



SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

KINGDOM OF GOD

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The Kingdom of God is the family of God ruling as the government of God. It is a future world-ruling government to be set up on earth by Christ at His return, with Jesus as King and the resurrected spirit-composed saints in positions of co-rulership with Him. The Kingdom of God—referred to as a “mystery” in the New Testament—was preached and explained by Christ, then by His church; it shall be established on earth for a thousand years following Christ’s return, and shall be completely fulfilled when New Jerusalem and God the Father come down out of heaven to dwell on the new earth.

Mark 4:11; Revelation 5:10; 20:4; 21:1–3, 7, 10

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Kingdom of God is, in its most narrow sense, the immediate family of God, presently composed of only two persons (the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ). In a more general sense, it includes every being and thing that is under God’s sovereignty, governmental control, and influence. Within this definition, the entire universe can be considered under God’s sovereignty and part of His empirical Kingdom. However, prophetically, the meaning of God’s Kingdom is much more specific. It is the

world-ruling government of God set up on earth at Jesus Christ’s return. Christ, together with the resurrected saints, shall rule over all nations and peoples. More specifically, the *spiritual* Kingdom of God shall comprise only the spiritual members of this world government—the born again, spirit-composed sons of God who rule with Christ as resurrected members of His family over the physical earth during the thousand year period (Rev. 20:4) and eventually over the entire universe. This spiritual Kingdom of God is the goal of all true Christians (Rev. 5:10).

The story of the Bible, in a very real sense, is the actual record of God’s working with man so he might learn to understand, obey, and, qualify for entry into God’s Kingdom and family. The gospel of Jesus Christ is (or includes) the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The message about the future establishment of the Kingdom is a subset of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is central to the story of the Bible and to each of the annual holy days, which picture God’s plan of salvation for mankind, including the promise of the Kingdom of God. The Old Testament prophets spoke at great length concerning that Kingdom (Isa. 2:1–5; Mic.4:1–5; Zech. 14).

“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob: that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:2–4).

Likewise, the patriarchs envisioned it and waited

for it as “strangers and pilgrims” (Heb. 11:13) on this earth, since they knew God’s government would replace man’s. They sought this Kingdom just as many men might seek a land—country or homeland—of promise (Heb. 11:14–15).

“These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:13–16).

Jesus Christ was a member of God’s family, of the Godhead, and hence of God’s Kingdom, from eternity. But He divested Himself of His Godhead and authority to become human, in order that He might announce the coming Kingdom of God and qualify as its chief executive officer, as both King and Lord. Jesus—the primary messenger of the coming Kingdom and heir to its throne—was in a sense the personification and embodiment of that Kingdom on earth during His physical lifetime and ministry. This is why He stated, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk. 1:15). The Kingdom of God was indeed “at hand” because Jesus Christ, as its King and Lord, was right there. Jesus clearly spelled this out when He mentioned His being among them was equal to the Kingdom being in their midst. “Being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God was coming, He answered them, The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, Lo, here it is! or there! for behold, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Lk. 17:20–21).

The message of “good news,” or gospel, which Jesus brought to this world also has, as its focal point, the announcement of the coming Kingdom of God, the description of how it shall be established on earth and the explanation of how mankind might enter it as sons of God. Christ, through His death and resurrection, became the “firstborn” member of this prophetic spiritual Kingdom. Interestingly enough, the apostle Paul remained faithful to this subset of the gospel he preached near the end of his life (Acts 28:23, 31).

Christians who follow in the footsteps of Jesus’ life will likewise follow in the reality of His resurrection. They shall be raised from death to rule with Him in His Kingdom (Rev. 2:26–27). By this process, God shall increase or build His divine family and spiritual Kingdom from the present two members to an innumerable multitude (Rev. 7:9).

In one sense, those begotten of God’s Spirit are part of the Kingdom of God already, since they actually have the essence of that Kingdom, God’s Holy Spirit, dwelling within them. Furthermore, Christians today, like Jesus during His physical human life, are representatives of that Kingdom since they, like Jesus, shall be kings and priests. Paul wrote that God “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13), indicating that Christians are already considered part of God’s Kingdom. Obviously, no human being can really be a part of God’s Kingdom since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:50); this must wait until the resurrection when “the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality” (v. 54). Paul is just reiterating what Jesus Himself told Nicodemus.

“Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3:3–7).

No description of the Kingdom of God would be complete without reviewing the parables of the Kingdom that Jesus spoke during His ministry. For his disciples and those whose eyes and ears were open, Jesus revealed that the Kingdom would start small and grow (parable of the mustard seed and parable of the leaven). He spoke of the great value the Kingdom message has for those who find it (parable of the pearl of great price, parable of the hidden treasure). In the parable of the sower, Jesus explains how some people will accept God’s invitation and message, while others will not because of Satan’s deception. Sadly, there are many distractions like persecutions and lusts of the world taking

priority in the lives of so many. Finally, also, in the parable of the growing seed, Jesus encourages us not to be discouraged if our labour seems fruitless, because even when we sleep, God oversees growth in ways we might not know, to ensure a harvest in God's timetable.

Much confusion has arisen about the Kingdom of God because of human reluctance to take the term "kingdom" literally. The prophet Daniel was very clear in his statements to Nebuchadnezzar that the Kingdom, which God would eventually set up, would actually be a kingdom on earth in the same literal sense as previous world-ruling kingdoms. "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to other people. It shall break in pieces these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

Scripture reveals that God's Kingdom on earth is indeed to be a kingdom in every sense—having territory, laws, subjects, and rulers. At Christ's return the saints shall be resurrected, changed from physical flesh into glorious immortal spirit beings.

"But we would not have you ignorant brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:13–17).

The resurrected saints shall sit with Christ on His throne (Rev. 3:21), and rule under Christ on earth with power over the physical nations. "...and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth" (Rev. 5:10). "He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26).

Additionally, God's Kingdom shall have two parts: the ruling body of spirit beings and the physical nations under that government and control

made up of physical human beings. This combined physical-spiritual Kingdom shall replace man's governments. It shall conform to God's laws, statutes, and commands and over a period of time introduce and establish His way of life in every nation and culture. The entire fabric of society shall be eventually changed and reformed to comply with the precepts and concepts of God Almighty. It shall be a government that allows all human beings to lead a happy, healthy, prosperous life. All persons alive at that time shall have an opportunity to be saved and have God's Spirit living in them. God shall make a new covenant with His people through which He shall change mankind's very nature by writing His law in man's heart.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:31–34).

In God's Kingdom, warfare shall finally be eradicated and the implements of war shall be turned into farm tools because "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us His ways and we may walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war

any more; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (Mic. 4:1–4).

Christ shall judge with “righteousness” and “decide with equity for the meek of the earth”—indeed the whole earth shall be dramatically altered by the loving leadership and authority of Jesus Christ—even the nature of wild animals shall be changed.

‘There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of His roots. And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth, and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of His waist, and faithfulness the girdle of His loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; Him shall the nations seek, and His dwellings shall be glorious” (Isa. 11:1–10).

Food and drink shall be in abundance (Isa. 25:6), the lame shall walk, and the nations who were previously staunch enemies shall live at peace. Israel, Egypt, and Assyria shall even set the example of peace and godly harmony for others to follow (Isa. 19:23–25). Throughout this time, many humans shall be entering God’s spiritual Kingdom and family. Using Israel as the example, God’s spiritual laws for worshipping Him shall be taught to, and followed by, all nations. “From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD” (Isa. 66:23).

“And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16–19).

Biblical revelation has very little description of daily life during the thousand-year period. Although Micah’s description mentions every man shall sit under his own vine and his own fig tree (Mic. 4:4), this should not lead us to conclude the only food available will be grapes and figs. Likewise, we should not conclude that the Kingdom of God will be a primitive and totally agrarian society, devoid of education, arts and sciences. Assuredly, Micah’s abridgment should be understood as showing mankind will be both free and fully at peace during this time (though it may be plausible that the larger proportion of people could be involved in agriculture).

Based on our knowledge of God, who is the Creator of the human mind, we may logically posit that the Kingdom of God shall employ high technology, in its most sophisticated expression, in every sphere of that society—including the areas of manufacturing, energy, transportation, communication, information processing, architecture, city planning, etc. Yet, this technology, under God’s direction, will not produce the debilitating by-products characteristic of today’s world pollution—energy will be clean and inexhaustible; waste products will be recycled; cities will be safe and sane; the ecology will be respected and the environment protected. Growth will not be wildly uncontrolled and encouraged for its own sake, but rather organized and ordered in accord with God’s master plan for the entire earth.

Increasing levels of scientific knowledge, technological application, and consumer consumption shall, no doubt, take place. Yet the fundamental spiritual values of life shall always predominate.

Growth shall never eclipse the importance of individual human beings and human families. Indeed, more people will probably find their occupations in or near the home environment. Education at all levels and in all areas shall be a primary activity for all people.

The Millennium shall be a time of the greatest advances in the field of human creativity in areas such as the arts and in every segment of science. The human mind shall be freed from the inhibitions of evil—no longer shall warfare and competition dominate the enormous developmental time, energy, and financial resources of countries and individuals. All efforts shall be devoted to the peaceful edification of society. The most artistic and dynamic works of human history—the most magnificent musical compositions and performances, the most beautiful paintings, the most expressive literature, etc.—shall be created under God’s laws.

Although the administration of the Kingdom of God shall enforce a uniform law for all nations and peoples, and there are indications there shall be a universal language (Zeph. 3:9), this does not mean that cultural differences between people shall be eliminated. On the contrary, the diverse and unique personality, culture, music, art, dress, and habits of each nation shall be preserved and encouraged. God’s laws are universal in scope and shall be applied to, and shall strengthen, all peoples in all cultures in all environments. Travel and cultural exchange shall exist, with the primary intent—at least initially—of teaching all nations to follow the example of God’s people, Israel. To accomplish this, all nations shall send representatives to Israel to learn of God’s ways and laws (Isa.66:18–21, 23; Zech. 14:16–19), and Israel shall send teachers to all countries to help them apply these new concepts and put them into practice in their daily lives.

All through the thousand-year rule of Christ, God shall continue to add people to His Kingdom. At the end of the Millennium all who have ever lived and died without having a fair first chance for salvation shall be resurrected as physical beings to live in God’s perfect society (Rev. 20:12). Those accepting salvation shall be inducted into God’s spiritual Kingdom—His family—while those who reject God’s gracious offer shall be destroyed in the lake of fire. Immediately thereafter a new heavens and new earth will appear (Rev. 21:1). Thus, we find God’s Kingdom expanding in steps and growing

dramatically from only two beings to an innumerable multitude through the process begun and made possible by and through Jesus Christ and His resurrection.

Ultimately, following the thousand-year rule of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment, God shall replace the old earth with a “new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21:1). This reformation of heaven and earth is part of the “restitution of all things” spoken of by Peter (Acts 3:21). The Father shall come to earth, ruling with Christ who shall then be second in command at His Father’s side (1 Cor. 15:27–28), and God’s entire family shall rule and share the entire universe. (Christ shall deliver the Kingdom to His Father, 1 Cor. 15:24.)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from throne saying, Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. And He who sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. Also He said, Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true. And He said to me, It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son” (Rev. 21:1–7).

“And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations” (Rev. 21:22–26).

“Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit

each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall worship Him; they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:1–5).

Revelation 21 and 22 are surely a complex amalgam of literal description, awesome imagery, and representative symbolism. Yet with all of this, the Bible only gives a hint of what God shall do after His plan for mankind has been completed and expanded so dramatically for His family and Kingdom. However, indications are that God shall in one way or another continue to enlarge His family forever.

“For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end...” (Isa. 9:6–7).

The scope of God’s family shall literally be “all things”—that includes the whole universe. “Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet. For in that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we see not yet all things put under Him” (Heb. 2:8).

The incredible majesty of God’s Kingdom—the fact that man is to become part of God’s family and co-rule and co-inherit the entire universe—is called a *mystery* in the New Testament. Jesus called it the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” in Matthew 13:11, and “the mystery of the kingdom of God” in Mark 4:11. This mystery includes several concepts “which [have been] kept secret since the world began” (Rom. 16:25) and “hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to His saints” (Col. 1:26)—for example, the opportunity for gentiles to participate in the Kingdom of God (Rom. 11:25) and become fellow heirs of the promise of Christ (Eph. 3:6); the uniting of all things in heaven and earth in Christ according to God’s plan and purpose (Eph. 1:9); the relationship of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32). But the most important aspect of the mystery of the Kingdom of God is the fact that man can be a part of the family of God (1 Cor. 15:51ff; Heb. 2:10–13) and is ultimately destined to be joint-

heirs of the entire universe with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:16–17). This mystery, “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), is ordained for “our glorification” (1 Cor. 2:7) and shall be fulfilled at the resurrection when the seventh trumpet sounds (Rev. 10:7).

The Bible states that the purpose of human life—the ultimate goal for all human beings—is to eventually be born into the God family. This remarkable fact is surprisingly easy to prove. There is no difficult exegesis involved. In one sense, all that is required is a four-step process:

a) The Creator of the Universe is the one who became Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:2).

b) Jesus Christ is equal with God (Jn. 5:18; Phil. 2:6).

c) We are joint-heirs with Christ, and as a sure result, we shall all be glorified together with Him (Rom. 8:17).

d) Whatever glory God the Father has given Christ will be shared with us (Jn. 17:11, 22).

Also, a word-by-word reading—without interpretation—of Genesis 1:26 is all that’s required. Here God succinctly gives the purpose of human life: Whereas animals reproduce after the animal kind, man reproduces after the God kind! Or, more properly phrased, human beings are the instruments through which God is reproducing Himself.

Human beings shall always retain their individually distinct minds—they shall become individual personalities in the Father’s God family. Man shall do what God does. Man will feel, act, enjoy, and experience at precisely the same presently incomprehensible level of awareness at which God feels, acts, enjoys, and experiences. From the example of Jesus (the first man to be transformed into a spirit being, 1 Cor. 15:20), we see that man shall not lose his unique awareness or his individuality. Man will not be diffused into the “cosmic consciousness,” man will not be absorbed by the “infinite intelligence,” and man will not be swallowed up by “universal love.”

As a matter of fact, just the opposite is true: The members of God’s family in tomorrow’s world shall be more distinct from one another than members of the human family are distinct from one another in today’s world. All shall have their own individually specific memories, abilities, personality traits, jobs, responsibilities, preferences, and ideas. But there

won't be any competition or conflict. Because the old culprit—self-centered human nature—will have long since been eliminated.

Mankind has been promised to be made “equal with God.” What this simply means is individual human beings shall eventually become *qualitatively* equal with God because they will have been born into the God family, thereby considered actual “sons of God” (Rom. 8:14–15). Obviously this does not mean individual human beings shall eventually become *quantitatively* equal with either God the Father or Jesus Christ in position or authority—they will always remain supreme in their roles quantitatively. Being “equal with God” only means we shall be in the same God family as the Father and Christ are—it has nothing to do with equality of power, authority, intelligence, or role within the family. The Father will always remain the Father as Christ will always be our elder brother, Savior, and Creator—the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 22:13).

In other words, those who shall be resurrected or changed “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52), shall share the exact same spiritual dimension and qualities of spirit life which today are only possessed by God the Father and Jesus Christ.

For example, one of God's qualities is that He has inherent life—He generates eternal life intrinsically within Himself, because God is life. “For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself” (Jn. 5:26). Consequently, human beings born into God's family are promised eternal life (Jn. 3:16, 36; 4:14; 6:47; 7:38; 10:28; 17:2, etc.).

Every individual person has been created to grow toward divine sonship (Rom. 8:1-15)—to become a literal resurrected Spirit-born son of God—a son who is in every way “like” his Father, yet a son who is always in thankful and gracious submission to his Creator Father and elder Brother Jesus' reigning role.

But clearly, man shall never equal God the Creator, just as God the Creator (Jesus Christ) shall never equal God the Father's authority, or reigning position (Jn. 14:28). In similar manner the human family, defined by a heterosexual marriage, reflects this understanding very clearly. The father and mother will always retain those roles, but this does not dismiss the access of joint-benefits with the

inherited security the sons and daughters receive by being part of the family—they are co-heirs of the family of God (Acts 26:18).

These two original beings in the God family shall always remain in overall command. Their absolute authority will never be questioned—although they will delight in sharing progressively more of their responsibilities with their offspring as the God family continues to expand throughout space and time.

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RESURRECTIONS

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Mankind's hope and the promise to the Christian is the resurrection from the dead. The Bible refers to (1) the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead and the pioneer of our salvation; (2) the resurrection of the saints—called the “first resurrection”—at the return of Christ when the true believers shall become spirit-composed members of God's family; (3) the resurrection back to physical life of all who have ever died without having understood God's way, for their first opportunity for salvation; (4) the resurrection of the incorrigibly wicked—those who have refused to repent and have rejected God's way—to be consumed in the lake of fire (called the “second death”).

John 5:28–29; Acts 2:32; Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17; Revelation 20:4–6, 13–14.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The resurrection from the dead is the *only real hope* of man, whether he believes it or even knows about it. It gives him final, ultimate victory over death, which is the common enemy of every human being (1 Cor. 15:26). Paul referred to the “hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago” (Tit. 1:2). When Paul was brought before Felix, he admitted that “according to the way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers. Believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets, having a hope in God which these themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:14–15).

The resurrection was the central theme of the apostles’ message, which they preached powerfully. It was often controversial. Paul was called a “babbling” by certain Greek philosophers “because he preached Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18); the resurrection from the dead was subjected to ridicule by some, and it intrigued others. “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, “we will hear you again about this” (Acts 17:32).

And hear again they shall; not only those ancient Greeks, but also every man, woman and child who ever drew breath on this earth. None who have ever died—in whatever place or at whatever time—are forgotten by God. Numerous scriptures make plain that a resurrection from the dead is an integral part of God’s plan for all mankind (Job 19:25–27; Jn. 5:21–29; 11:23–25, etc.).

Scripture shows us an incredible special miracle where some people that died were brought back to life—resurrected—to live their physical lives for a while longer (1 Kings 17:22; Mk. 5:41; Jn. 11:44; Mt. 27:52; Acts 9:40). Jesus Christ, however, was the first to be resurrected from physical death to eternal life. He was in fact “designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). His resurrection is extremely important to the Christian because it proves the viability of God’s plan. We have “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable” (1 Pet. 1:3); but “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain

and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). Christ’s resurrection demonstrates positively that God can and shall resurrect a person who has God’s Spirit dwelling within him. It is the faith and belief that God shall resurrect the Christian as Christ was resurrected that encourages one to continue along the path of salvation. “For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His” (Rom. 6:5).

Jesus Christ is called the “firstfruits” of the dead, because He was the first of many who shall follow Him in the resurrection, but “each in his own order.” First Corinthians 15:20–26 explains further:

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order: Christ the first fruits; then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

The Scriptures record resurrections for three different classifications of persons. The first is prophesied to occur at the return of Jesus Christ. A comparison of the pertinent verses indicates this first resurrection includes all saints that have lived and died from Adam’s time until Christ’s second coming, including those still alive when He comes (although technically, they shall be “changed” rather than resurrected—1 Cor. 15:51). This resurrection is from the nothingness of physical death to the incredible majesty of spiritual life as members of God’s family. “Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6).

Another resurrection is prophesied for the multiple billions of human beings who have lived and died never having had a chance for salvation. This resurrection is from physical death to a second physical life during which a person shall be given God’s Spirit and the knowledge of salvation. The truth of God shall be opened to their understanding

at this time and their lives shall be lived according to the biblical precepts. Ezekiel 37:1–14 paints a breath-taking picture of this resurrection to physical life, “Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves” (verse 12). Though only Israel is discussed, this is because it shall be the example—the nation that shall show how God’s plan works; thus, all nations and peoples of the earth are included in Ezekiel 37 by implication. This is confirmed in both John 5:25–29 and Revelation 20:11–12:

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it; from His presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done.”

The Scriptures record one final resurrection classification. It is mentioned in various passages (e.g., Dan. 12:2–3; Jn. 5:21–29; etc.) but is explained most precisely in Revelation 20:14–15. Here John explains that the unrepentant—those who have had a chance for salvation but have adamantly rejected it—shall be resurrected to physical life and cast into the lake of fire where they shall be consumed. The death they suffer is called in Revelation 20 “the second death” (v. 14), which occurs only for those whose names are not found written in the book of life—that is, those who have not obtained salvation (v. 15). This final resurrection is essentially a mercy killing for those to whom eternal life in their state of rebellion would eventually mean extreme agony and misery.

The first resurrection of saints to eternal life and the subsequent resurrection of the innumerable multitudes to physical life will be moments of unimaginable emotion when loved ones who thought they were separated forever—parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives—shall suddenly be reunited. For them it will be as though no time had passed, like awakening in the morning after a solid night’s sleep without dreams; it will be the next instant of their consciousness from the instant of their death no matter how they might have died or how long ago it might have been.

Clearly it is expected that numerous questions

about these awesome events will be raised. Paul asked and answered the most obvious one himself: “But some one will ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” (1 Cor. 15:35). He then explains that as different animals have different types of bodies, so the body of the resurrection is different from all others. It is celestial, imperishable, glorious, and spiritual.

“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and, the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:42–57).

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PROPHECY

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Biblical prophecy is a historical and contemporary vehicle by which God demonstrates His power over the events of human history. The primary function of predictive prophecy is to show the sequence of events culminating in the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. The process by which this comes about is outlined in many passages of the Old and New Testaments.

Isaiah 46:9–11; Matthew 12:36–37; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 19:10; Isaiah 58:1

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Central to the understanding of biblical prophecy is the recognition that God is Governor and Supreme Ruler, not only of the nations on earth, but the times and seasons as well. God portrays Himself as the real Author of human experience, the One who has formulated a master plan that culminates in the establishment of His government on earth and the vast majority of mankind qualifying to participate in it as Spirit-born sons of God.

(Note: Some people are sensitive to the word “qualify,” noting that Scripture refers to salvation as a “gift”—Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8. It is important to note that “qualify” can have different meanings. Those who “qualify” are those who meet the conditions for salvation, and there is a huge difference between a *condition* and a *cause*. If you don’t have faith, or if you have it and then abandon it, you don’t qualify for the Kingdom, for you never had—or you abandoned—the necessary condition of faith. For example, a father may promise a new car to a son, if he gets his driver’s license. When he gets his license, he qualifies, and he gets the gift. The driver’s license is not the *cause* of the free gift; it was a *condition* to be met before he could receive the free gift.)

One aspect of prophecy is it *proves* God’s existence. No man or other mortal could predict the future and then bring it to pass (Isa. 41:22ff). But one need not wait until the future to prove God’s existence through prophecy. He can look to many Old Testament prophecies telling of Christ’s first coming—prophecies that have already been completely fulfilled in their letter and intent. Looking further, the numerous biblical prophecies pointing toward Jesus Christ’s return to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords are so powerful and so specific that they shall forever eliminate agnosticism and skepticism about God’s existence, once they have been fulfilled.

It can be said that predictive prophecy is history written in advance. It is interesting to note that much of prophecy (perhaps most) is *conditional*, consisting of promises/warnings relative to the choices of the people to whom the prophecies pertain. Also, prophecy is God’s thinking and judgment on historic and contemporary situations and circumstances. It is not just about the future; it’s also about the present and how God wants us to behave. Amos provides a principle, “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). This assures us God has not left man totally in the dark about the general course of future world events. However, we need to remember, Amos’ statement was made within the context of a warning message to the covenant community (Israel). Through the prophet, God has warned them of what is coming upon them if they don’t turn back to Him. The “secret” (Amos 3:7) had already been revealed, and now Yahweh is about to act. The “lion has roared,” and only fools are “not afraid” (see v. 8). This text should not be seen as a universal promise that God will provide a warning every time something terrible, like a tsunami, earthquake, or terrorist attack, is about to occur.

The term “prophecy” is most often used today to mean “prediction of the future.” The original prophets of ancient Israel had a role somewhat different from this. They did predict what would happen in the future, but this was usually in the context of the nation’s sins and the penalties their country would reap if the people did not turn from their evil ways. Sometimes fairly specific sequences of future events were laid down. Normally, however, prophecy was rather general, outlining where the people

went wrong and what would happen if they did not repent. At various times prophecies or oracles were pronounced against some of Israel's neighbors such as Assyria and Babylon. Prophecy and its spokesmen (prophets) have played a significant role from virtually the beginning of man's existence (Lk. 1:70; Acts 3:21). This role is not solely dedicated to declare futuristic developments but to also affect the behavior of individuals and nations in respect to divine laws and God's master plan.

This relationship between prophecy and morality is clearly and consistently interwoven throughout the Old and New Testaments. As a matter of biblical fact, Jeremiah records this relationship as affecting the future of every nation on earth:

"The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it" (Jer. 18:7–10).

The vast spectrum of biblical prophecy is varied in form. Some prophecies were written as a result of dreams or visions, others by direct communication with heavenly beings. The prophetic words are occasionally clear and to the point; in other instances the statements are vague and ambiguous.

There are several principles and keys (such as symbolism and duality) that govern the correct understanding of prophecy. These must be used consistently with the right methods and proper understanding of the background and context to arrive at the sought-for answers.

A *symbol* is something used to represent something else. An example of symbolism in the Bible is the use of the word "mountain" to mean large nation (Mic. 4:1–4). The Bible generally interprets its own symbols—although many times in verses somewhat removed from the symbolic statement. *Duality* is the term used when a prophecy has more than one fulfillment. An example of a duality would be Matthew 24:12–20, which describes both the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and events to occur just before the return of Jesus Christ. (The terms "type" and "antitype" can also be used to describe the original reality and the later understanding of biblical

events, ceremonies, persons, times, etc.)

The breadth and scope of prophecy has ranged from individuals to nations to the entire earth and beyond. In some cases it is evident that prophecies were announced and fulfilled and no longer have relevance in our day except as historical examples and lessons. But most major prophecies are yet to be fulfilled. And there is no doubt these major prophecies are focused on the return of Jesus Christ. It is the one major thread that binds both Old and New Testament prophecy together.

In the same way that the prophetic Kingdom of God is the focal point of the gospel, so also is Christ Himself the focal point of all prophecy throughout the Bible in both testaments. The Old Testament is the story of Christ's genealogy, and the prophecies of His first and second comings. Indeed the whole thrust of the Old Testament—including the Levitical sacrificial system, which included many symbolic acts typifying Christ and His sacrifice to pay the penalty for humanity's sins. The New Testament is the story of His life and teachings and the detailed prophecies of His coming Kingdom.

No prophecy is an end to itself. Any prophecy only has lasting importance in the final analysis, because it adds to our knowledge of Christ, His family, His way of life, His return, His coming Kingdom, and the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the setting up of God's Kingdom. If one forgets this simple truth, he may find himself wandering from obscure prophecy to obscure prophecy, restricted to learning about relatively unimportant technicalities while missing the overall thrust and importance of the basic prophecies leading up to Christ's second coming and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

It is paradoxical that so often the more uncertain points of prophecy tend to receive the most attention. It sometimes seems these hard-to-decipher prophecies attract interest in direct proportion to how *little* about them is overtly stated in the Bible. There is nothing wrong with the study of obscure prophecies—indeed, it is quite understandable—so long as the relative importance is kept clear, and the prophecies about Jesus Christ are kept the clearest. God designed the human mind to enjoy the intellectual "high" which the probing of prophetic secrets affords. "It is the glory of God to conceal things: but the glory of kings to search things out" (Prov. 25:2).

But there is a definite reason why God inspired the clear and obvious prophecies of the Bible to be clear and obvious. He wanted no one to miss the primary point of all prophecy: that Jesus Christ is to return and set up His Kingdom on earth. For one properly to understand prophecy, he must realize all future prophecies must relate to Christ and His Kingdom, and that for any specific prophecy to be properly understood, it must be seen against the context of Christ's second coming.

Most of the Bible's prophecies focus on the "end time" (either primarily or dualistically), a time period of colossal, momentous worldwide problems culminating in total human destruction if Christ would not intervene to stop it. This present age is the best candidate for the "time of the end" that history has ever seen. No other previous time has paralleled the present capacity for man to eliminate all human life from the earth. The many possible methods of human self-annihilation now extant—whether quickly through nuclear, chemical, or biological warfare, or more slowly through famine, pollution, or disease—fit the biblical patterns and descriptions. Certainly, the key scripture of Matthew 24:22, "no human being would be saved" (RSV); "not a mortal could survive" (*Berkeley*); "not a soul would be saved alive" (*Moffatt*) could only be literally possible in an age like ours of thermonuclear overkill and global megaproblems.

The commission to the Church of God is to preach the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all nations (Mt. 24:14). In addition to the message of Christ's death, forgiveness and salvation, the message Christ preached is both a warning and a witness—a *warning* about mankind's plunge toward annihilation and a *witness* about what God will do to stop it. This message is a *prophetic announcement* of Christ's second coming and the government He will set up at His return, and it is indeed the primary reason for the Church's existence at this time.

As stated, the focal point of all but a few specific historical prophecies is the "end time," culminating in the return of Jesus Christ. In a number of instances the end time is specifically tied into historical prophecies which have already been fulfilled to a certain degree or type. For example, the long and intricate prophecy of Daniel 11 and 12 leaves known history at a certain point and clearly envisions the future resurrection and establishment of

the Kingdom of God. Similarly, Matthew 24 describes the historical fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, yet these scriptures also project forward to the "consummation of the age."

Thus there is often a *duality* in prophecy. Events of past history will be paralleled by events immediately preceding the time of the end. Yet the general outline of end-time events is repeated from prophecy to prophecy with little deviation in basic structure. These may be summarized as follows:

Immediately preceding the intervention of Jesus Christ is a time of unprecedented worldwide trouble. This is expressed in various ways by language which is both literal and metaphorical. However, a consistent theme is "a time such as never has been nor ever shall be," a time when "no flesh shall be saved" from destruction if God did not put a stop to the calamitous course of human events.

A specific sequence of tumultuous geopolitical developments shall focus on the Middle East, and Jerusalem shall be the central spot in and around which these major prophetic events shall take place. The major and minor prophetic books are replete with descriptions about, and admonitions to, Jerusalem in the end time. Great international contention is seen brewing over Jerusalem, which shall move the city even further onto the center stage, as world events rush toward their climax. Indeed two of the key signs that Christ gave His disciples was that the fulfillment of all biblical prophecy and the subsequent establishment of God's Kingdom would be at hand "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (Lk. 21:20) and when you "shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place" (Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14). Furthermore, the two witnesses, who shall preach and prophesy against the entire earth, shall center their activities near the site of the temple in Jerusalem (Rev. 11:1–4).

God said He would make Jerusalem "a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it" (Zech. 12:3). Though treacherous times are yet ahead for Jerusalem (e.g., Zech. 14:2), God states He shall go forth into battle against, and utterly destroy, all those nations that shall have gathered against Jerusalem (ch. 14:3, 12; 12:9), "and the LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first" (Zech. 12:7) when Jesus Christ returns. In these incredible

(and forthcoming) days, God shall greatly strengthen the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Zech. 12:8); He shall pour out His spirit of grace and supplication on them (v. 10); He shall change the geography of the city when Christ's feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), and when living waters shall flow forth from Jerusalem nourishing the whole earth (Zech. 14:8). "In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:23). "Strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and pray before the LORD" (Zech. 8:22), "and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain" (Zech 8:3). (Much uncertainty remains, however, even about that which seems sure. There is difficulty determining the precise time frame of many verses. For example, Zephaniah 2:7 has been applied to both the modern state of Israel in the Middle East and to the future millennial state: "And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: ... for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.")

A pivotal set of verses regarding the crucial geopolitical sequence of events in the Middle East is Daniel 11:40ff. These verses describe a "king of the north," who—in response to being "pushed at" by the "king of the south"—shall come against the king of the south "like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over." Verse 41 continues: "He [the king of the north] shall enter also into the glorious land [holy land], and many countries shall be overthrown." The specific delineation of nations—the Holy Land, Egypt, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Libya, Ethiopia—leads to fascinating speculations and captivating observations as one watches the current international geopolitical landscape develop.

Daniel 2, together with Revelation 13 and 17, expands our understanding of this "king of the north." This kingdom shall be a composite or union of "ten kings" (states or groups of states), which shall constitute a resurrection of the Roman Empire in an economic, political, military, and religious confederation that shall figure prominently in the various end-time prophetic geopolitical encounters.

Clearly, the political union of Revelation 13 and

17 is described in terms which first century Mediterranean people would have recognized. Readers would have seen a scantily veiled representation of the Roman Empire with its military might, its political intrigues, and its rule over much of the known world. Indeed, the harlot of chapter 17 is called "the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth" (v. 18), a clear reference that many would have simply understood it as Rome itself.

This illustrates that prophecy is often given in symbols that would have been directly meaningful to the present time and situation in which the prophecy was originally given. This makes the interpretation of prophecy, both easier and difficult at the same time. The end-time "Babylon" or "Roman Empire" will certainly have characteristics in common with its ancient counterpart. On the other hand, it will also have differences which prevent an exact correspondence with the historical "type" or symbol. Thus, while one may look at the contemporary scene and make identifications that seem plausible, there is no guarantee that one's speculations are exact. After all, many of the "prophecy charts," time schemes, reconstructions, and the like of the past two millennia have been internally consistent and externally cogent. There was only one real flaw: they were wrong! So, the only real value of any prophetic presentation is ultimately a quite obvious test—will it, or will it not, actually occur in reality?

Whatever the prophetic specifics in fact turn out to be, the outlines are assuredly clear: There will be swirling currents of international alliances and confederations vying for world power through economic, political, military, and religious control; and the focus of their attention shall be the Middle East in general and Jerusalem in particular.

As the tangled complexities of world events hurtle toward their awesome conclusion, a comprehensive series of seals, woes, trumpet blasts, and plagues are unveiled with ever-increasing regularity, tension, and fury. (The book of Revelation describes these futuristic events in first century language.) At the climax of everything, with mankind literally on the brink of total self-annihilation, Jesus Christ returns to earth, accompanied by a spectacular series of heavenly signs (Joel 2:31; Mt. 24:29–31; Rev. 12–17). At His return, the dead in Christ shall be resurrected, and the elect still living

shall be changed to spirit to rule with Christ on Earth from Jerusalem (Zech, 14:1–9).

“For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:15–17).

This shall be the most majestic moment in universal history, the focal point of the Bible, the time to which prophecy has primarily projected.

“When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54–57).

Christ and the saints will be opposed initially by a system called “Babylon,” and leaders referred to as “the Beast” and the “antichrist.” These shall all have characteristics of persons and institutions of past history, even though they shall have a unique existence at the end time. They shall be destroyed and Satan, who has incited the rebellion against Christ, shall be cast into a place of spiritual restraint (Rev. 20:1–3).

Then begins the millennial rule of Christ and the saints over the earth. After some continuing confrontations and battles (described in Ezek. 38 and 39), God’s Kingdom shall be set up over all peoples; and Jesus Christ shall teach them God’s laws, the way of happiness and eventually of eternal salvation. This 1,000-year period shall be followed by the Great White Throne Judgment and finally the new heaven and new earth, both of which are descriptively hazy, as the Bible does not reveal much information about either.

Whenever God has chosen to intervene in human history, important circumstances of major consequence were always involved: the course of nations, the role of governments, the fate of kings, and the destinies of peoples. God’s direct interaction with, and control over, the kings and governments of

Babylon and Persia (Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus) are two prominent Old Testament examples that illustrate His involvement with the nations and the world rulers at that time. Prophecies against Egypt and Assyria are also additional other examples.

We know at least one biblical prophecy that “failed,” not because God erred, but because the people fully responded *en masse* to God’s warning and unitedly repented. Jonah was sent to Nineveh to predict its fall in forty days. This was a prophecy from God; it did not take place. This example illustrates the fact that much *specific* prophecy is contingent upon the actions of the parties involved (Ezek. 33:7–16). The implications for today are obvious; the responsibilities of God’s “watchmen” are enormous.

Bible prophecy has an ongoing critical relevance to the course of modern nations and the destinies of contemporary peoples. The identity of certain modern nations in terms of their ancient names is important for understanding current and future events. Some nations such as Egypt retain their exact original names. Other names, though somewhat changed, are easily traceable; for example, Judah (or the House of Judah) represents the Jewish people in the modern state of Israel, while Moab and Ammon represent the Arab peoples in modern Jordan today.

The modern identification of the “House of Israel” as the United States and British Commonwealth is an important part of the Church’s prophetic understanding. While the United States is understood to be specifically represented as “Manasseh” and the British Commonwealth as “Ephraim,” the identity of the remainder of the original Israelite tribes is uncertain (though some evaluations have been made, such as equating France with Reuben.)

The identification of the United States and British Commonwealth as the House of Israel leads to serious and momentous prophetic implications for the future. The time of the end is also called “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), because the modern descendants of the House of Israel shall be taken captive by “strangers” and severely oppressed. It will take the return of Jesus Christ to rescue and free the modern descendants of the patriarch Jacob from national humiliation and restore them to the knowledge of God. This event shall be of such enormous magnitude that Israel’s original exodus

from Egypt shall be forgotten by comparison (Jer. 16:14–15, 23:7–8, Is. 11:16; 27:12–13).

God has given us a general overview of the Church itself in prophecy, with its main commission dedicated to preparing the way for Christ's return by preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14). The admonition to the "watchman" of Ezekiel 33 applies as well:

"...if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes, and takes any one of them; that man is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand" (Ezek. 33:6).

Although enormous numbers of incredibly detailed prophetic schemes have been deduced from the Bible, the success record of correctly predicting future events and dates has been rather meager. Hindsight has always been more successful than foresight in determining the reality of prophecy. Certainly the injunction to "watch at all times" (Lk. 21:36) must be heeded, but the Bible does not give any major examples of people acquiring specific predictive knowledge of the future from the written prophecies alone. Yet, as mankind's history approaches "the time of the end," a generation when "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased," prophecy in general and the book of Daniel in particular shall become progressively more understandable (Dan. 12:4).

Shall there come a time when God will directly inspire some of His servants to literally prophesy about imminent world events? Biblical indications and precedents would suggest so. Joel 2:28—"I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions"—was applied by Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But the context of Joel 2 is clearly just "before the great and terrible day of the LORD" (v. 30–31), indicating that the primary fulfillment of Joel 2:28 is yet ahead.

What is abundantly clear from the Bible is this absolute fact: Jesus Christ will return to earth and set up a world-ruling government of God during a time of great human turmoil and disaster. Also emphasized in the Bible is the sequence of events immediately surrounding Christ's return (primarily before, but after as well), not the long detailed his-

tory of centuries between New Testament times and the end time.

The Bible does not encourage speculating or predicting specific dates when a prophecy is to be fulfilled and then planning one's life around what is forecasted to happen on or by such a date. To the contrary, we are told, "But of that day and hour no one knows" (Mt. 24:36). The "faithful and wise servant" will be aggressively and persistently doing God's work at the return of Christ, and will not have shrunk back from life's responsibilities because of his (real or imagined) interpretations of prophecy (Mt. 24:36ff).

Though prophecy has always been intriguing and exciting to those seeking to know the future, Paul's strong admonition is that "if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Love, then, is the essential characteristic of the Christian—it is the clearest stamp of God's Spirit in action. Interestingly enough, Paul continues his contrast of love and prophecy in this chapter. "Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away (fail, KJV)...For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:8–10).

The study of prophecy can be an interesting and rewarding experience. It is indeed placed in Scripture to be investigated, analyzed, and appreciated in a Christian's relationship to God. However, it is still unfolding and we must be careful to let events in the real world guide our understanding of the times and seasons, rather than leaping ahead with speculations not grounded on actual events supported by Scripture. As we draw nearer to the climax of mankind's civilization, we will see the convergence of major prophetic developments. No doubt they shall take on sharper focus and point us more precisely to the surest and most important prophecy of all—the return of Jesus Christ.

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GOSPEL

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The gospel is the message preached by Christ and by His Church about God's coming Kingdom, the restoration of His government on earth, and how mankind can enter that Kingdom and government. It includes the message of what Jesus has done, is doing, and shall do—and ultimately is the message of the entire Old and New Testaments. The primary purpose and commission of the Church is to proclaim this gospel to the entire world as a witness to all nations, and to baptize and teach those who respond.

Matthew 3:2; 24:14; 28:19–20; Mark 1:15; Luke 24:47

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The word “gospel” simply means “good news.” The gospel of Jesus Christ is the *good news* that He is coming again to establish His Kingdom on this earth in place of man's governments, and the *good news* of how we can become part of that government as sons of God. Hence, the gospel is called “the gospel of the Kingdom of God” (Mk. 1:14), and it is this gospel that Christ came preaching (same verse). As Jesus went on to say, repentance and belief in the gospel go hand in hand (Mk. 1:15).

In its broadest sense, the gospel includes the whole story of the Bible—the whole panorama of what God is doing with mankind, especially God's plan of salvation and forgiveness of sins.

The true gospel is a message of hope given to a world in danger of destroying itself. Christ's return is the essential component of the biblical message. The reason for His return is the establishment of His Father's Kingdom on earth, putting an end to man's unhappy and unsuccessful rule. Hence, Christ's return and coming Kingdom is the subject of the message that He commissioned His disciples and Church to preach to all nations until His return.

In John 18:33 Pilate asked Christ, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.” That is the true gospel. Christ, destined to rule this earth as the King of God's Kingdom, was to preach this message—the good news to the world. He came to bear witness to the truth—to tell the world that God's Kingdom is going to rule this earth whether mankind believes it or not.

This world-ruling Kingdom is alternately referred to as the Kingdom of God (Luke 19:11), the Kingdom of heaven (Mt. 6:10), and the Kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11:15). Its full eschatological realization is described as the regeneration (Mt. 19:28), the times of refreshing (Acts 3:19), and the world to come (Heb. 2:5).

The disciples of Christ had no doubts about the message Christ was preaching. They understood He was coming again to put an end to this present evil age and to replace it with the glorious Kingdom of God that Daniel described (Dan. 2:7, 7:17–18, 26–27). The fact that the apostles asked Christ when His Kingdom would be set up proves they knew about that coming Kingdom and had great expectation of it. Christ's answer to their question was His Kingdom would not be set up until the gospel of that Kingdom should be preached to all the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14).

The message of the coming Kingdom of God includes, as an integral part, the preaching of spiritual salvation for all, through Jesus Christ—that He died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1–3) and that He was resurrected (v. 14). The only person who has already been saved is Jesus Christ, who was resurrected from the dead and now sits at the right hand of God the Father. He is the pioneer of our salvation, the one who has gone on ahead and shown the way (Heb. 2:10). When He returns, at the end of this age, those who have died in Christ in previous years shall be raised from the dead and given eternal life to rule with Him (Jn. 5:24–29). Previous to His return, salvation will have been accepted by a minority of people; after His return, it shall be made available to all.

Thus, the true gospel is God's message to man through Christ about His coming Kingdom and how humans may enter it. It includes the ultimate purpose of human life and the plan devised by God to bring it about. This is the true destiny of man—to

become *members of God's family*. This potential of being born of God as His children in His family is universally applicable to all mankind—it is the potential of men and women, Jews and Gentiles, all races and peoples, for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).

This gospel was understood in part by the Old Testament patriarchs and the prophets. It has been preached “since the world began” (Lk. 1:70). Hebrews 11 states that these men died in faith—not yet having received the “promises” (i.e., of the Kingdom of God and eternal life, v. 13)—“but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” waiting for God’s Kingdom. Those who acknowledge the temporary physical existence of this life “declare plainly that they seek a country” (i.e., the goal of God’s Kingdom, v. 14).

Likewise, many Old Testament verses show plainly that those with whom God was dealing then knew of His coming Kingdom.

“For unto us a child is born, and unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulders:....of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth and even forever” (Isa. 9:6–7).

Only God’s government and Kingdom could be eternal—the Kingdom referred to in these verses (see also Dan. 2; Mic. 4; Zech. 14; etc.).

The gospel of the Kingdom of God can be traced from the patriarchs of Old Testament prophets, through the ministry of John the Baptist, and finally to Jesus Christ who greatly expanded our understanding of His coming Kingdom and showed how men might enter it as members of the God family. Christ commissioned the disciples to preach it in all its important aspects. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19–20). “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Mt. 24:14).

The early disciples followed Christ’s command to preach this gospel of the Kingdom as a witness to all nations. The Church of God also follows this

command and views as the primary reason for its existence the commission to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to all nations in accordance with Jesus Christ’s instructions. The Church today strives to continue fulfilling that commission with ever-increasing effectiveness, following in the tradition of Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist (Mal. 4:5–6), by preparing the way for Christ’s return through the announcement of that gospel message.

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JUDGMENT

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The time of one’s judgment is the time of his opportunity for salvation, extending from one’s calling by God until his death (or the resurrection). During this judgment period a person’s mind is opened to understand God’s way, and his actions and attitudes are being evaluated by God in the light of His way of life and His law. All human beings since Adam and Eve shall have a fair opportunity for salvation either now (for the Church), or at the time of the second resurrection, in the Great White Throne Judgment. Those who shall qualify for God’s Kingdom—perhaps the overwhelming majority—shall inherit eternal life, and those who deliberately reject God’s way shall be consumed in the lake of fire.

Matthew 13:49–50; 25:34; 1 Peter 4:17; Revelation 20:15; 21:8

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

One of the most awesome truths of God is that all of mankind, from the time Adam and Eve were cre-

ated until now, shall have a fair opportunity for salvation—the attainment of eternal life in the family of God. No human being is doomed forever simply because they have never heard of Christ’s name or never really understood God’s purpose and plan. God makes it plain that He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). He intends to give everyone a chance to know and understand His truth and to have the opportunity to be with Him in His glorious Kingdom (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4).

Combined with this thrilling truth about all men receiving an opportunity for salvation is the fact that all men will not receive this opportunity at the same time. The time during which individuals receive their chance of salvation is the time of their judgment. The term “judgment,” as used in this context, is not restricted to passing sentence. Rather, it implies a process, a period of time during which a person’s mind is opened to understand God’s plan, and his actions are now under daily scrutiny by God in the light of His law. God is intimately concerned with His children and works in their lives to produce the ultimate results. The parable of the tares of the field shows that Christians start out as seeds and must grow until the harvest (Mt. 13:36–43). Generally, this judgment process for most people covers a period of many years of one’s life.

But judgment involves more than just making a “yes” or “no” decision—more than the simple determination of whether a person shall be granted salvation—for, indeed, the overwhelming majority shall make it. Judgment also involves the *reward* that God shall give to each person who qualifies. There are different positions and responsibilities in God’s family. As Jesus explained in the parable of the pounds (Lk. 19:12–27), the servants who used their pounds profitably were given positions of rulership, but the level or degree of their position was directly proportional to how much they accomplished. The parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14–30) shows that God rewards each person according to what he accomplished (his works) in relationship to what he had to start with. The servant who started with two talents and made two received the same reward as the servant who started with five and made five.

Revelation 20 provides God’s revelation to mankind about two great judgment periods, each of

which specifically addresses a different classification of persons. The first period of judgment began at the creation of man and continues until the return of Jesus Christ. During this period, the vast majority of people, due to deception and a widespread lack of knowledge of the true gospel, have not responded to God’s call. Only a relatively small group—“the elect” (Rom. 8:28ff)—have responded in genuine faith and been converted. These “elect” have had their minds opened to understand God’s truth and are given God’s Holy Spirit during this present age. For these persons—who compose the Church, or “house of God”—the period of judgment is *now*. “For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God” (1 Pet. 4:17). (The “elect” includes Old Testament people of faith, as well.) Those who respond to God’s call now—by virtue of God’s mercy—are acting on an inner desire to serve God (Ps 42:2, Jn. 7:37). Paul provides a scriptural reason for these Christians to not be boastful when he says, “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

The masses have not responded to God’s call now because of Satan’s deception and selfish human nature—and God wants man to learn by experience that his ways apart from God are the ways of death (Prov. 14:12). Those who do respond to God’s call now are called for the express purpose of preaching the gospel to the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14; 28:19–20) and to prepare for rulership in God’s millennial Kingdom (Rev.5:10). All those qualified for God’s Kingdom—from Adam and Eve to the return of Christ—shall be resurrected (or “changed” from flesh to spirit) at Christ’s second coming. The end of this first judgment period is thus completed at the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5–6).

During His thousand-year reign, Christ and the saints shall re-establish God’s government on earth (Mic. 4:1–4) and reconstruct society so that in every way it conforms to God’s holy laws. God shall also pour out His Spirit upon all those who will be alive during this time, and open their minds to understand the gospel, giving them a chance for salvation. Isaiah describes this time: “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever

er you turn to the left” (Isa. 30:21). This describes how the formerly rebellious people will readily receive God’s Word. The “word” from their teachers and leaders will always be with them, guiding them along the right path.

After the thousand-year period, there is the “Great White Throne” judgment—also described in the Bible as the second resurrection (Rev. 20:5–6). This spectacular event epitomizes the time when all who ever lived and died without having had a chance for salvation—never having heard about Jesus Christ and the plan of God, or never had their eyes opened to actually understand the true gospel—shall be resurrected from the dead to physical life (Rev. 20:11ff). This time their minds shall be opened to a much fuller and clearer understanding of God’s laws and His truth.

“Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves...And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, says the LORD” (Ezek. 37:12–14).

This judgment period is the largest because it includes the innumerable multitudes of all humanity who have lived and died in ignorance of God’s way.

Although God wants everyone to accept the knowledge of His truth and earnestly desires that

all obtain salvation, it is nevertheless true that some shall totally reject God and lose out on eternal life. Those who have adamantly rejected this truth—those who have committed the unpardonable sin by not asking God to pardon their sins—shall be thrown into the lake of fire (Heb. 6:4–8; 10:26–31; Rev. 20:14). These individuals are those who would never repent of their sins and shall therefore be put out of their misery by a merciful God. It would be a cruel punishment for God to allow a rebellious person to live forever under His government when that individual has permanently rejected God’s government in his life and by his actions and attitudes.

God’s fairness, justice, concern, and love for mankind is exemplified by these judgment periods outlined above. His plan for salvation includes ample opportunity for all those who have ever lived and died to live a full physical life under God’s laws, to qualify for entry into His Kingdom, and, ultimately, to gain eternal life as full Spirit-born members of His divine family.

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