

17. WHAT WAS GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE FOR THE CHURCH AND KINGDOM OF CHRIST?

[Note: Dates given herein are according to "The Chronological Bible" edited by Edward Reese]

INTRODUCTION

Numerous prophecies appear throughout the Old Testament foretelling of a kingdom that was to be established in the last days whose king would be the promised Messiah. When John the Baptist and Christ came on the scene, much of their teaching had to do with this kingdom. John preached that the kingdom was at hand (Matthew 3:2), and Christ declared that there were some alive during His earthly ministry that would not taste of death until they had seen this kingdom come with power (Mark 9:1). The establishment of this kingdom however, was synonymous with the establishment of the Lord's church (Matthew 16:18-19), for both the church and the kingdom have the same head, the same subjects, the same domain and the same law. Prior to the day of Pentecost following Christ's resurrection from the dead (Acts 2), the kingdom and church are both spoken of as being in the future, but after the day of Pentecost both would be spoken of as being in existence (Acts 2:47; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). And from that time forward, much of the teaching revealed in the New Testament would be over things concerning the church (Acts 2:47) and the kingdom (Acts 8:12) of our Lord.

In the religious world there has been much controversy over the nature and identity of the Lord's church/kingdom revealed in the New Testament. Much of this could be eliminated if we would but take time to make a study of (1) God's eternal purpose for the church/kingdom before it was ever established; and then (2) look at what the church/kingdom was like after it became a reality. This then is a study of Biblical prophecy and fulfillment as it relates to God's eternal purpose for the church and kingdom of our Lord.

1. WHO WOULD BECOME KING OF THE KINGDOM AND HEAD OF THE CHURCH?

Micah 5 [prophecy - 704 B.C.]

2 But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah,

yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.

Isaiah 9 [prophecy - 732 B.C.]

6 For unto us a Child is born, unto 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**.

7 Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Luke 1 [Prophecy - 6 B.C.]

30 Then the angel said to... Mary...

31 "...behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.

32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.

33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Matthew 16 [prophecy - 28 A.D.]

18 ...I will build My church, and the gates of Hades (*powers of death*) shall not prevail against it. -Jesus Christ

Ephesians 1 [fulfillment - 29 A.D.]

20 ...God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. cf. Col. 1:14-19; Phil. 2:9-11

2. WHO WOULD BE THE CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST?

Daniel 7 [*prophecy - 550 B.C.*]

27 Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.

That this would include both Jews and Gentiles is evident from Isaiah 2:2; 60:3-4 and 62:1-2. Such was fulfilled in the first century when, following His resurrection, Christ commissioned His followers to preach the gospel to **all nations** (Matt. 28:18-20) and **to every creature** (Mark 16:15; cf. Acts 2:39; 10:1-48). The apostle Paul would write:

Galatians 3 [*A.D. 57 - 58*]

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus...

Although those from all races would be given opportunity to enter the Lord's church and kingdom, it should be remembered that while many would be called, few would be chosen (Matt. 7:13-14; 20:16; 22:14; Luke 13:23-30). Jesus said:

Matthew 7

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." cf. Matt. 7:22-27; 12:46-50; Luke 6:46; Heb. 5:8-9; James 1:22-25; 1 John 2:3-5; Rev. 22:14.

3. WHERE WOULD THE DOMAIN OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM BE LOCATED?

Daniel 7 (*prophecy - 550 B.C.*)

14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. cf. Ps. 2:7-8; 72:8

Luke 17 [*A.D. 28*]

20 Now when (*Jesus*) was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered... and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation;

21 nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

Later, in about A.D. 51, the apostle Paul would declare that "God... does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24).

1 Corinthians 3 [*A.D. 57*]

16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

1 Corinthians 6 [*A.D. 57*]

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. cf. Rom. 8:9; Eph. 3:17

4. WHAT WOULD BE THE LAW FOR THE CHURCH AND KINGDOM OF CHRIST?

Jeremiah 31 [*prophecy - 597 B.C.*]

31 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant..."

33 ...I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts..."

Ezekiel 37 [*prophecy - 580 B.C.*]

26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. cf. Isa. 2:2-3; 51:4; 55:3

[*Fulfillment: A.D. 29*] The New Covenant, for which Christ died (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:15-17), embodied the teachings of Christ which He desired to be made known to all peoples and nations (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Tim. 2:4). And this law of Christ (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21), is that by which mankind will someday be judged (Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:12). Jesus said:

John 12

48 "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him -- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

49 For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say...

50 And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak,

just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.” cf. Luke 10:16; 1 Tim. 6:3-5

5. JUST HOW UNITED DID THE LORD INTEND FOR THE CITIZENS OF HIS KINGDOM TO BE?

Jeremiah 32 [prophecy 586 B.C.]

38 “They shall be My people, and I will be their God;

39 then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them.

40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.”

Ezekiel 37 [prophecy 580 B.C.]

22 “and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again.

24 ...and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them.

Zephaniah 3 [prophecy 624 B.C.]

9 “For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord.”

All fulfilled in Christ in the first century A.D.:

John 10

16 [Jesus said:] “And other sheep (*Gentiles*) I have which are not of this fold (*Jews*); them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

John 14

6 Jesus said... “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 17

20 “I do not pray for these (*the apostles*) alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; cf. Eph. 2:11-18; Col. 2:11-14

21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. cf. Acts 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10

22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: cf. Phil. 2:2; 3:16; 4:2;

23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” --*a prayer of Christ*

1 Corinthians 1

10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13

Ephesians 4

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

6 one God and Father of all...

Philippians 3

16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

6. HOW LONG IS THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST TO ENDURE?

Isaiah 9 [prophecy: 732 BC]

7 Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever...

Daniel 2 [prophecy: 604 BC]

44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed... it shall stand forever.

Daniel 7 [prophecy: 550 BC]

13 I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.

14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-13

Luke 1 [prophecy: 6 B.C.]

33 And He (Jesus) will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. –the angel Gabriel

All fulfilled in Christ:

Matthew 24

35 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” –Jesus Christ

Acts 2

32 “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.

33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” --Peter

The apostle Paul wrote that at Jesus’ second coming: **“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death”** (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

7. CONSIDER THE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM AND ITS COST TO CHRIST:

Matthew 13 [prophecy: A.D. 27]

44 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls,

46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Christ purchased the church with His blood- Acts 20:28

Ephesians 5 [fulfilled in Christ]

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her...

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

8. UNTO WHAT DID CHRIST AND THE APOSTLES COMPARE THE KINGDOM?

In organization the church was compared

unto a human body (1 Cor. 12:12-17): the head is Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18) and its members are His followers (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

In fellowship the church was compared to a family. The Father is God and the children are His people (Rom. 8:16-17; Eph. 3:14-15).

In love the church was compared to a marriage: Christ is the husband and the church is His bride (Rom 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-25; Rev. 21:2).

In unity the church was compared to a sheepfold: Jesus is the Good Shepherd and the sheep are those who hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:1-16; cf. Psalm 23; 1 Pet. 5:4).

In terms of construction, Christ and His church are compared to a builder and his building: Christ is the builder (Psalms 127:1; Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:9), the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) and the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:19-22), with His disciples being living stones (1 Peter 2:5).

In work, the kingdom was compared to a vineyard: the owner is Christ, the vineyard is the church/kingdom and the laborers are God’s people (Matt. 20:1-16).

In influence, Jesus compared the kingdom to **“leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened”** (Matt. 13:33).

In the day of Judgment, Jesus declares that the kingdom will be like **“a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away”** (Matt. 13:47-50; cf. Matt 13:24-30, 36-43; 18:23-35; 25:1-46; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 4:17-18; 2 Pet. 3:1-18).

9. WHERE AND WHEN WOULD THE LORD'S CHURCH AND KINGDOM HAVE ITS BEGINNING?

Isaiah 2 [prophecy: 745 B.C.]

2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. cf. Joel 2:32; Hebrews 1:1-2

3 Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word

of the Lord from Jerusalem. cf. Micah 4:1-2

Daniel 2 [prophecy: 604 B.C.]

44 “And in the days of these kings (of the Roman empire) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

Matthew 3 [prophecy A.D. 25]

1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,

2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

Mark 9 [prophecy: A.D. 28]

1 And He (Jesus Christ) said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”

Luke 24 [prophecy: A.D. 29]

46 [After His resurrection, Jesus said:] “...Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,

47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

48 And you are witnesses of these things.

49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” -- Jesus Christ [spoken to His apostles]

Acts 1 [prophecy A.D. 29]

4 And [Christ] being assembled together with them [His apostles], He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me;

5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

7 And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be

witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

THE FULFILLMENT

The apostles returned to Jerusalem (Acts 1:12) as Jesus had commanded them and received the promised power (the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit) some ten days later on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). On that occasion, which was a fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32, there were Jews gathered in Jerusalem from every nation which in turn provided an audience and the opportunity for the gospel to be preached by the apostles (Acts 2:5-28). The apostle Peter, speaking as the Holy Spirit directed him, helped this Jewish audience to see that they were guilty of crucifying the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom God had raised from the dead (Acts 2:29-36). Now observe what followed:

Acts 2

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

47 ...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Thus, in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following Jesus resurrection and ascension, the prophecies of the coming church and kingdom were fulfilled. That the kingdom had become a reality was also verified by the following:

The apostle Paul declared that God

Colossians 1

13 **“...has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love...”**

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

29 For our God [is] a consuming fire.

And the apostle John would speak of himself as being in the kingdom:

Revelation 1

9 I, John, both your brother and companion **in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ**, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

In Conclusion

Let us remember that this is the temporal phase of the kingdom (the church) in contrast to the heavenly or eternal phase which flesh and blood cannot inherit (1 Corinthians 15:50; cf. Acts 14:22; 2 Peter 1:10-11). Jesus declared that one must first **“be born again, born of water and the Spirit”** before one can see or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). According to John 1:12-13, those who receive and believe in Christ are not said to be sons of God, but rather are given the power or right to become sons of God, and in becoming sons of God they are said to be born of God. Other passages that speak of being born again are:

1 Peter 1

22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

23 **having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...**

1 Corinthians 4

15 **“...in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.”**

James 1

18 Of His own will He brought us forth [began - KJV; gave us birth - NRSV] by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

But from John 3:5, we learn that the Holy

Spirit also plays a role in man’s spiritual birth. And thus we read:

1 Corinthians 12

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

So to what does the phrase **born of water** refer in John 3:5? Jesus implied that He is the water of life (cf. John 4:10-14; 6:35; Revelation 21:6; 22:17). That He plays a part in the new birth is evident from the following:

Galatians 3

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Galatians 4

19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you...

Colossians 3

10 **...put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him...**

Romans 13

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. Cf. Rom. 6:3-5

1 Peter 1

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has **begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...** Was and is Christ in that begotten (new birth) process? If one is born of God, is he not born of Christ? After all, the Bible refers to Him as **“mighty God, everlasting Father”** (Isaiah 9:6), **“God with us”** (Matthew 1:23), **“the image of the invisible God”** (Colossians 1:15), etc.

One of the most basic and fundamental things that happens when one is born is that one takes upon himself the likeness of the one who begat him/her. The only reason we don’t look like beasts or birds is because our parents were not beasts or birds. The point is: God created Adam in His likeness. If we are born of God, The Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ and His Word, we take on their likeness and translate that Word into a life that is righteous, godly and holy (Titus 2:11-12; 1 Peter 1:13-16). If we are born of the Spirit (John 3:5), we take on His likeness and bear the fruit of the

Spirit which is **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...** (Gal. 5:22-23). If we are born of the God, then we take on His likeness, and marks of one thus born are described as follows:

1 John 2

29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

1 John 3

9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

1 John 4

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

1 John 5

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

1 John 5

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith.

18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

If we are born of Christ, the water of life, then consider the following:

Philippians 2

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus... *Note: to explore this farther, see Lesson 16: "How Important Is It To Be Conformed to the image of God's Son?"*

The Lord's church is frequently spoken of as His body (Eph. 1:20-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18; etc.). One, therefore, must enter Christ (His body, church, kingdom) before entrance can be attained in the heavenly or eternal kingdom.

Acts 2

47 "...the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

Ephesians 5

23 "...Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." Cf. Ephesians 1:22-23

The next lesson, No. 18 in this series, explores the question: "What Did Christ Build When He Built His Church?" Again, it is important that we "Let The Scriptures Answer."

—David W. Echols Sr.