

A Biblical and Theological Overview of God's Glory through the Institutions of Government  
and Church to Demonstrate the Not-yet View of the Kingdom-age

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**Abstract:** This article explores the relationship between the present-age church ministries and the present-age governing, political ruling authorities to conclude the Messianic Kingdom-age of political rule and world-wide spiritual transformation are not identified with the New Testament Church. The article overviews God's sovereign rule through imperfect and sinful intermediaries to demonstrate distinct differences between God's present Kingly sovereign rule and His future earthly Kingdom-age to support the not-yet-view of the Messianic Kingdom-age.

## **Introduction**

Traditional dispensationalists affirm the not-yet view of the Messianic Kingdom age. The future Messianic Kingdom entails the 1) personal, earthly presence of Messiah, 2) His personal political, kingly Davidic rule over Israel with world-wide governing political implications and 3) His world-wide priestly ministry of spiritual renewal centered in Israel. The already-not-yet views of inaugurated eschatology emphasize the Messianic Kingdom-age is here in some spiritual fashion being identified with the church. This article explores the relationship between the present-age church ministry and the governing, political ruling authorities to conclude The Messianic kingdom-age of political rule and world-wide spiritual transformation is not identified with the New Testament Church.

The paper overviews God's sovereign rule through intermediaries, the delegated role and authority of government, and the role and authority of the church. The paper demonstrates differences between God's present sovereign Kingly rule and His future earthly messianic Kingdom-age through demonstrating distinctions between the role of government and the church.

## **The Fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 and God's Sovereign Kingly Rule<sup>2</sup>**

### **The Seed Promise and the Future Kingdom-Age**

God's providential, universal rule and reign over mankind is described in Genesis 1-2. Prior to the fall into sin, mankind lived in direct relationship with God under a kind of untested

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from "A Biblical and Theological Discussion of Traditional Dispensational Premillennialism," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* (Spring 2013), 5-56 co-authored with Dr. H. Wayne House.

theocratic rule as God appeared and communicated directly to Adam. Importantly, mankind was to serve as a vice-regent under the direct reign and in dependency of Yahweh. As Pentecost emphasized, “God was recognized as sovereign and the sovereignty that belonged to God was delegated to man, who was to rule over the earth in an exercise of Yahweh’s authority. In this theocracy Adam was seen to derive his authority from God and therefore, since he was called upon to be in submission [to Yahweh, Adam’s] . . . rulership was God’s [rulership].”<sup>3</sup>

Yahweh’s Edenic theocratic rule involved a perfect harmony of (1) God as direct ruler over mankind; (2) the realm of rule, and (3) man and woman ruling in response to Yahweh. Since God alone is completely autonomous and independent, when mankind acted independently to follow the Serpent’s word, he challenged and sought to usurp God’s direct theocratic rule. This attempt of independent rule resulted in the fall of man to include the inability to properly image God and a forfeiture of direct access to Yahweh. God’s rule would no longer be direct and immediate in the form of theocracy but rather mediated through his revelation—namely through the prophetic word of promise for final victory in Genesis 3:15—a seed from the woman would destroy the Serpent. McClain correctly states:

Man’s original dominion, being wholly derived and mediatorial in character, was to be exercised under the direction of God. It was just here that the first Adam dismayingly failed. . . . This failure of the first Adam, with reference to his mediatorial dominion, introduced into the stream of human history a hiatus which to the present hour has not at any time been wholly remedied.<sup>4</sup>

The promised future seed of the woman would bring complete, total, and final victory over the Serpent and his seed. The seed of the woman would restore mankind to properly function as image bearers in direct relationship with Yahweh. Since the fall of man occurred in creation-time

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<sup>3</sup> J Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 435.

<sup>4</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BHM, 1974), 43.

and the promise of victory occurred in creation-time, then the victory over the Serpent and reversal of the curse must also occur in creation-time.<sup>5</sup>

The conflict portrayed in Genesis 3:15-16 between the seed of the Serpent and the seed of the woman illustrate an extended, earthly, conflict resulting in final, earthly destruction of the Serpent and his rule. The promise of victory through the singular seed of the woman then creates anticipation and expectation of a future, total, complete victory; this is the essence of Messianism, which is later portrayed as Messiah's personal rule and restoration of mankind to God's direct theocratic rule. The remainder of Genesis and the Bible demonstrate the historical development of Yahweh calling out the elect seed of the woman to personally crush the head of the Serpent, thereby removing the curse and re-establishing God's direct theocratic rule. Throughout the Old Testament, the future Kingdom-age is directly linked to God's future, direct theocratic rule and restoration.

The OT prophets portray the future Kingdom-age with Eden-like terminology (Isa 11:9; Ps 2:8) as occurring on earth that reverses the curse. Isaiah emphases, "And her wilderness he will make like Eden" (Isa 51:3). Ezekiel links fulfillment of his new covenant promise to Israel in declaring that desolate Israel will "become like the garden of Eden" (Ezek 36:35) and that the Lord himself will act on behalf of his name alone in fulfilling the prophecy (Ezek 36:22-38). Hosea writes that even the beasts of the field will all "lie down in safety" (Hos 2:18).

Messiah-God reigns in Jerusalem and exercises Davidic rule upon earth to re-establish his direct sovereign rulership to fulfill his promises. The Lord will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords over the entire earth (Zech 14:4, 9, 16; Ezek 37:24-25). National Israel will be redeemed and experience full, covenant rest according to OT prophecies (Jer 31:33-34; Zech 12:10; 13:1, 6, 9). The nation will be the Lord's messenger to the Gentile nations.

The Kingdom-age, millennium government will be a theocracy (Zech 14:9) and though centered in Jerusalem, it will extend in authority throughout the entire earth (Mic 4:1-2; Dan 7:13-14, 27), resulting in world peace and immediate justice for sin (Isa 11:3-5). There will

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<sup>5</sup> Non-dispensational Carl F. H. Henry correctly articulates the essential case for a millennial kingdom is based upon these tenants: "the Old Testament prophets speak so emphatically of a coming universal age of earthly peace and justice that to transfer this vision wholly to a transcendent superterrestrial kingdom is unjustifiable; (2) because the historical fall of Adam involves all human history in its consequences, it requires an historical redemption that extends as far as the curse is found' to complete Christ's victory over sin; (3) the most natural interpretation of Revelation seems to suggest an earthly millennial reign of Christ prior to the inauguration of God's eternal Kingdom" (Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983], 6:504).

be peace and prosperity throughout the earth (Isa 2:4; 65:21-23; Amos 9:13-15; cf. Isa 9:4-7; Mic 4:3-4) and the curse will be almost removed even leading to tranquility in the animal kingdom (Isa 11:6-9) with geological changes (Zech 14:4; Isa 11:15). The Lord's enemies including the heavenly hosts will be confined and imprisoned (Isa 24:21-22). Disease and deformity will be rectified and sickness virtually unknown (Isa 33:24) and long life will be common (Isa 65:20-22). Importantly, both sin and death will occur, so this future earthly Kingdom-age (millennial Kingdom) description cannot be confused with the eternal state (Isa 65:20). Joy and gladness of heart will prevail (Isa 25:8-9; 30:29; 60:15; 61:7). The millennial worship will be world-wide though it will also entail a unique place of worship in Jerusalem.

Christ indeed is the seed of the woman (Gal 4:4) who was struck on the heel in his death (John 13:1-3; 19:30) and then Christ struck a death blow to the Serpent in His resurrection and ascension to the Father (Col 2:14-15). However not all the provisions of the Genesis 3:15 promises are presently fulfilled. The curses continue to serve as a constant reminder to man and woman that (1) they need divine initiative and assistance to overcome evil; (2) the Serpent's word of independent rule is indeed a lie; and (3) Yahweh's direct theocratic rule is not currently established.

Yahweh's unequivocal, unconditional word of promise to develop this future seed promise illustrates that His heavenly, kingly sovereign rule is different than the promised rule in the future Messianic theocratic Kingdom in which the seed promise is fulfilled. "God's kingdom means God's *reign* and the various times, spheres, and purposes of his overall reign have taken on different forms."<sup>6</sup> God's ongoing always present sovereign rule in administering this Genesis 3:15 seed promise should not be confused with His future theocratic rule. There is then a recognized difference between God's heavenly Kingly reign in sovereignly bringing the seed promise to fulfillment vs. His actual future theocratic reign and rule. The Scriptures stress that until the Kingdom-age is inaugurated, God sovereignly rules through imperfect and sometimes immoral intermediaries.

### **Overview of God's Sovereign Kingly Rule to bring Fulfillment of Gen 3:15<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>6</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (MI: Bethany House, 2005), 461; emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from "The Christian and Civil Disobedience: A Biblical and Theological Overview," by Dr. David Mappes, *Baptist Bulletin Digital Edition*, July/ August 2015, 79-85.

The Scripture writers portray God as the all Sovereign One throughout the Old and New Testament. He is exercising His supremacy in orchestrating events to fulfill His sovereign decreed plan. God's decree is all-inclusive, meaning it includes everything that happens (Ps 115:3; Isa 14:24-27; Daniel; 4:34-37; Eph 1:11). After Nebuchadnezzar was humbled, he correctly reasoned that God's "kingdom endures from generation to generation" (4:34) and that "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth" and that "no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (4:36). Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that God reestablished his rule as king of Babylon. When Daniel spoke to Belshazzar regarding Nebuchadnezzar, he said "the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and *that* He sets over it whomever He wishes" (Dan 5:21).

Jeremiah emphasizes that the LORD had made the earth and would "give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight [and that] I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him." (Jer 27:5-6). In similar manner, Isaiah references Nebuchadnezzar, as he prophesies, "I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure' Isa 46:9-10; Isaiah then references Nebuchadnezzar as he writes, "Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country [and] I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass [and] I have planned *it, surely* I will do it" (Isa 46:11).

Joseph exclaimed to his brothers that while they intended evil against him, "God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen 50:21). And the Psalmist writes "For not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the desert comes exaltation, but God is the Judge; He puts one down and exalts another (Ps 75:6-7).

Paul reaffirms God's sovereignty to entail national timelines and national boundaries as he argues that God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). Even the normal day-to-day events are enveloped in God's sovereignty demonstrated by

James rebuking Christians for not saying, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that” (James 4:13-16).

### **God’s Sovereign Rulership through Subsidiary Authorities**

God has designated various subsidiary or intermediary authorities in accomplishing His will. These intermediaries have limited though delegated authority from God to accomplish their designated tasks. Three primary authorities in the NT include the family, the government, and the church (and by implication individuals in the government, church and family). Each has delegated authority from God to accomplish their specific tasks. Importantly God rule through these intermediary authorities is not equivalent to the future Kingdom-age prophecies. Since the future Messianic Kingdom-age entails the political/ governmental and the spiritual authorities these two intermediaries are examined. This examination will illustrate that the prophesied Messianic Kingdom-age has not yet been inaugurated.

#### **Governmental civil authorities and submission**

The concept of government is first illustrated in mankind's injunction to rule and subdue the earth as image bearers (Gen 1:26-27; 2:8-25) which is restated in Genesis 9:1-11. Grudem correctly argues that “God’s establishment of civil government in human society is found in the early history of Genesis, just after the flood, when Noah and his family came out of the ark [and] God says that he will require payment (‘a reckoning’) for the crime of murder, and that he requires this to be carried out by other human beings.”<sup>8</sup> Notably “God establishes the obligation to carry out the most severe punishment (the taking of a human life) in retribution for the most horrible crime (the murder of another human being) [so once] this principle is established, then the imposition of lesser penalties for lesser crimes is also validated, since if a government has the right to carry out the most severe kind of punishment, then it certainly has the right to carry out lesser punishments for lesser crimes as well.”<sup>9</sup> Government then entails a system of authority

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<sup>8</sup> Grudem, Wayne, *Politics - According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 77.

<sup>9</sup> Grudem, *Politics - According to the Bible*, 78.

involving power of orderly enforcement and rule. This rule in Genesis 9:1-11 entails protecting and preserving humanity by punishing evil doers.

In like manner, Paul explains that God intends government to restrain evil by promoting good and punishing evil-doers (Rom 13:3-4) thereby creating a relative safe and secure society. The present active participle ὑπερεχούσας (from ὑπερέχω) translated as “governing” clearly implies a “controlling position, *have power over, be in authority (over), be highly placed.*”<sup>10</sup> God commissions and authorizes governing rulers (i.e., government) to restrain and retard the effects of the curse through a kind of temporal and imperfect management. Government cannot eradicate sinfulness but rather it is to preserve order in society. Paul emphasizes that government is a “minister of God . . . an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil” (Rom 13:4).

Johnson observes that there are “four reasons that Paul offers for being subject to authorities. (1) Out of respect for the authority of God (vv. 1-2); (2) in order to escape punishment from the rulers which Paul views as an instrument of the wrath of God (vv. 2b-5); (3) for the sake of conscience (v. 5b); (4) and to promote the good within the social order (v. 4).”<sup>11</sup>

Importantly, Paul uses the present imperative ὑποτασσέσθω (from ὑποτάσσω) translated submission in v 5 to emphasize the subordinate relationship of the Christian to government.<sup>12</sup> Submission is the “recognition of one’s subordinate place in a hierarchical structure, i.e. the acknowledgement that certain people or institutions have been placed over us.”<sup>13</sup> This same term also appears in 1 Peter 2:13 and Titus 3:1 with respect to the Christian’s relationship to government. Paul further emphasizes this delegated authority of the government by arguing in Rom 12:19 that while wrath and vengeance belong to the Lord, the government alone will

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. and ed. Fredrick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1033.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald W. Johnson, “The Christian and the State: Romans 13:1-7” in *Review and Expositor*, 97 (2000), 92.

<sup>12</sup> Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian literature*, 1042.

<sup>13</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, “The Christian and Civil Authorities” in *Masters Seminary Journal 10:1* (Spring 1999), 92.

dispense that wrath upon evil doers (Rom 13:4). Hence, God administers His wrath through the secular state and not through individuals taking personal vengeance. This temporal and imperfect management by government does not comport to the future prophecies of theocratic rule of Messiah.

Paul was not naïve regarding abuses of government. He himself had experienced unjust treatment from Roman officers in beatings and imprisonment (2 Cor 6:5; 11:23-25, 32-33; cf., Acts 16:22-24) though he still emphasizes government's positive purpose(s). Paul clarifies that "Christians are not free to disobey a law just because it is unwise or because it fails adequately to promote virtue, truth, justice, liberty, equality, or godliness [as an] example, Paul instructs Christians to pay taxes to Rome (Rom 13:6-7)—taxes that would be used to finance the emperor's vain pleasure palaces and entertainment venues, his armies making war on other nations for no other cause than greed and glory, his civil government administration which routinely erected and staffed pagan temples as part of a large and powerful civic religion."<sup>14</sup>

Stein observes how Paul concludes this section of Romans with a specific application of the general imperative of being submissive given in 13:1. Therefore "we have a kind of 'inclusio' in which the commands of 13:1a and 13:7 bracket the entire account. The readers of this letter are to keep the general imperative of 13:1 by 'Pay[ing] all of them their dues.'"<sup>15</sup> Notably Paul emphasizes, "render to all what is due them" thereby indicating the government does have limitation in what is due them. Government only has authority to exact what is due. Thus obedience to government is a qualified obedience. Schreiner cautions that the "intention in Romans is to sketch in the normal and usual relationship between believers and ruling power (cf. Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17) [and that] Christians should submit to such authority and carry out its statutes, unless the state commands believers to do that which is contrary to the will of God."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Andy G. Olree, "Government as God's Agent: A Reconsideration of Romans 12 and 13" *Stone Campbell Journal* 8 (Fall 2005), 189.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Stein, "The Argument of Romans 13:1-7," *Novum Testamentum XXXI*, 4 (1989), 342.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans Vol 6*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 687.

Hence to “To disobey the laws of the land, except where they contravene the express will of God, is to violate the purpose of God himself.”<sup>17</sup>

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul “urge[d] that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men [and] for kings and all who are in authority so that [Christians could] lead a tranquil life in all ‘godliness and dignity’” (1 Tim 2:1-2). While Scholars debate the specific nuances of godliness (εὐσέβεια) in the Pastorals, the term denotes a sense manifesting a correct attitude towards God and is therefore similar to the “fear of the Lord in the Old Testament.”<sup>18</sup>

The injunction to pray for kings in authority directly relates to the ministry of the church in this context. Paul exhorts Christians to pray for governing leaders so these leaders will wisely dispense their stewardship from God so that Christians can live in godliness and dispense their responsibility—namely to proclaim the Person and work of Christ. Both the government leaders and Christians have separate respective spheres of authority and stewardship.

Peter, similarly exhorts the believers to both honor government leaders and to fear God as he writes, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right . . . love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king” (1 Peter 2:13-17). Interestingly, Peter reserves *fearing God* (similar to Paul’s statement about living in *all godliness* in 1 Tim 2:2) as reserved for God alone. The king (or emperor) can be honored though not feared as God would be feared. Peter may well be subtly denying any emperor’s claim to deity as only God Himself should be feared. Importantly, Peter was writing to Christians who were suffering persecution as “aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1; cf., 1 Peter 2:21; 4:12-13; 4:1-4). Many scholars believe that Peter wrote his letter just before or after the Neroian persecutions.

Both Paul and Peter stress that government has delegated authority to preserve order by punishing evil doers and rewarding those who do good. As an agent of God, government has

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<sup>17</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans Vol 27*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 244.

<sup>18</sup> Ceslas Spicq, *Les Épîtres Pastorales*, Librairie Lecoffre, Paris: J. Gabalda (1969), 485.

authority that is not resident in individual citizens. The state may tax or appropriately punish an evil doer while a citizen may not tax another citizen nor punish an evil doer. The government has authority to compel obedience of its citizens. The New Testament emphasizes that allegiance and commitment to Christ does not negate personal responsibility to civil government since there is no authority apart from God's sovereign will. This does not mean that God approves of all governments or leaders. Importantly the delegated authority of government is not dependent upon the morality of rulers or governments.

When threatened by Pilate, Jesus Himself said to Pilate, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11). In Matthew 22:21 Jesus said, "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." The philosopher-theologian-apologist Francis Schaeffer correctly and simply portrays this Caesar-to-God responsibility as not having God and government on the same level but rather as God supreme over government—government receives its authority from God thus the government's authority is not a proper, intrinsic authority to itself but its authority is delegated from God.<sup>19</sup> Government is portrayed as a fiduciary figure thus representing the trust of another consequently absolute, unconditional obedience is reserved for God alone.

It is noteworthy that submitting and honoring the government does not preclude criticizing or confronting leaders or governments. Jesus criticized both religious and political leaders (Mk 8:15; Lk 13:32; 22:25). In Mark 8:15 Jesus referred to the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod (Mk 8:15) and in Luke 13:32 He referred to Herod as a Fox. John the Baptist directly spoke against king Herod's incestuous relationship with Herodias, his brother's wife (Mk 6:14-19).

In summary, government has delegated authority from God to sustain order. When government is functioning according to its divine intent, then believers are to submit to its laws, honor the leaders, pay taxes (even excessive cf., Luke 2:1; 19:8), and pray for its leaders (Mat 22:15-22; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:11-17). The Scriptures emphasize that governmental authority is limited in scope. Neither State nor any ruler of state has the right to grant or bestow dignity, value or even purpose its citizens; rather government is

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<sup>19</sup> Francis Schaeffer, "A Christian Manifesto" in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview; Vol. 5, A Christian View of the West* (Westchester: IL, 1982), 468.

mandated to recognize, acknowledge, value and protect the dignity and intrinsic value its citizens. In summary, government is limited to providing *safety and security* of its citizenry but not individual *significance* of its citizens. *Significance* only comes through a personal and proper relationship with the Creator God through His Son Jesus Christ. Only God can provide individual significance and only God can demand unqualified obedience.

This section demonstrates no correlation exists between the future promised Messianic Kingdom-age of theocratic rule initiated by the personal presence of Messiah when compared to God ruling through sinful intermediary authorities.

### The Church and Authority.

The state is not mentioned as an agent of the mercies or mysteries of God in the New Testament though in the future Messianic Kingdom-age the state of Israel is mentioned as an agent of the mercies of God. Rather, the church is portrayed as a steward of God's Revelation including the gospel and serves as His agent for redemption and mercy. For sake of brevity, the church is defined here as God's indestructible royal-spiritual-priestly people originating at Pentecost and empowered by Christ through the Holy Spirit to represent and mediate God's presence in world until the rapture. Importantly, the church is a geo-political people of God with the highest and most absolute authority in its commission. The gospel commission entails making disciples by evangelizing and teaching everyone everywhere in the world about the person and work of Christ. In the great commission Jesus gives His authority and commands the church to "go and make disciples" until "the end of the age" (Mat 28:18-20).

The phrase "all authority" is non-conditional, absolute and has no spatial, people-group or governmental boundaries. The commission emphasizes complete, absolute, comprehensive commitment to Jesus and His teaching. This means that complete, absolute, comprehensive loyal-commitment and submission belong to Jesus alone. Identification and solidarity with Jesus means He alone is Lord and Master. His teaching becomes our teaching. Jesus specifies that the authority to make disciples of Himself is absolute and takes precedence as He indicates that He Himself will be with church in this mission.

There is no authority higher than this authority as commissioned to the church. This gospel commission includes making disciples of everyone including government rulers thus no

person or nation is exempt from the gospel mandate. Since the gospel is the “power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16), the very essence of “disciple-making” preclude any kind of forced, oppressive, or coerced, or tyrannical processes. The Biblical authors portray such confidence in the gospel message that in 2 Cor 10:3-4 Paul boldly asserts, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”

### **All Government Is Morally Accountable to God and His Law**

Since government and its rulers derive authority from God and is not autonomous, government leaders are then responsible to God’s moral law. This moral law is revealed in General Revelation and preserved in Scripture. Throughout Scripture, government leaders and rulers are judged for atrocities and mistreatment of humanity. God destroyed the world of Noah’s day because of unrighteous living. He judged the people at Babel for elevating themselves above God. He judged Sodom and Gomorrah not because they rejected Special Revelation but rather because they denied and rejected General Revelation (see Ezekiel 16:49-50) and the Lord struck down Herod Agrippa after he received adoration reserved for God alone (Acts 12:20-25).

Scripture clearly teaches that while some justice and judgment occurs in this world, God’s ultimate justice will be revealed in the final judgment (1 Pet 1:17) and the entire world will be held accountable. For this reason, every mouth will be closed. The entire world will realize their accountability before God (Rom 3:19). Christ Himself will return in a sudden, dynamic, cataclysmic manner to inaugurate the Messianic Kingdom-age culminating in an eternal theocratic rule. John in Revelation 20–22 and Daniel 2 and 7 portray this future Kingdom-age as a time when God Himself returns to end all current forms of evil human-mediated rule as he establishes His Kingdom.

Christians should disabuse themselves of any myth that through some political, social or religious transformative or reconstructive movement they will create a utopian atmosphere.<sup>20</sup> Rather, Christians should have moderate expectations of government role. Wisdom suggests that when possible individual believers should work to create a responsible government to execute its

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<sup>20</sup> Mappes and House, “A Biblical and Theological Discussion of Traditional Dispensational Premillennialism,” 44.

laws based upon morality while understanding that final and complete justice and judgment will only occur in the future Kingdom-age. Government cannot eradicate sinfulness but the government can and should preserve order in society and thus limit the effects of the curse based upon God's moral principles.

Notably, the New Testament authors framed conflict response between two great doctrinal truths: the substitutionary atonement and the personal return of Christ. Jesus died for the sins of opponents and persecutors so the goal is never simply to win a dispute, which might possibly turn opponents away from Christ or somehow impede repentance of a believer (I refer to this as the Lamb metaphor since Jesus died for the sins of opponents). Believers should frame their response within a biblical paradigm of redemption. In the return of Christ, Jesus will publicly reveal concealed sin along with the hidden motivation and conduct of believers; He Himself will avenge and vindicate His children (I call this the Lion metaphor since Jesus will roar). Ultimate justice for Christians will not occur until the Judgment Seat of Christ when the Lord Himself will redress unjust treatment.

### **Summary**

This brief overview of government and church indicates there is no correspondence to the future Kingdom-age Messianic government or to the future Messianic spiritual realities.

### **Additional thoughts on Civil Disobedience**

The Scripture authors do not provide any specific pattern of truth for believers when a government thoroughly and comprehensively fails to function according to its divine mandate. The Scripture does however portray believers as practicing non-violent limited acts of disobedience while still respecting the institution of government along with examples of citizens fleeing an unjust government; furthermore, these acts of civil disobedience occur with God's approval. Christian civil disobedience is understood as specific, non-violent, spiritually-motivated and biblically-approved conscious acts of disobeying a binding government or ruler's legal enactment or mandate that requires a Christian to violate God's specific normative truth in His word.

## Categories of Civil Disobedience

### Civil disobedience for unjust *permissible* laws

Some Christians advocate civil disobedience to laws that *permit* and promote though *not prescribe* gross acts of immorality such as abortion, euthanasia, genocide, gross sexual perversion, etc. This category of civil disobedience has a long and well-documented history and is associated with such thinkers as Samuel Rutherford, John Calvin, John Knox, and Francis Schaefer. Unfortunately, many examples provided in this category include complexities of resisting injustices promoted by a church-state government and not just state governments. Additionally, many of these examples in this category confuse the civil statutes embed in Israel's national fabric with the church or presume a kind of inaugurated eschatology that allows direct application of OT passages to the church.

Most advocates of this model indicate that resistance should always start in the spiritual realm and include legislative action and then move to civil disobedience to include peaceful, active resistance and perhaps the use of force. Examples usually cited include opposition to war crimes and deprivation of civil liberties. Other cited examples include Christians who actively opposed the Nazi regime and other oppressive governments. The abolition of slavery and participating in the illegal underground-railroad and rescue operations to deliver of slaves from prison are also noted. More recent examples include providing ministry and refuge to illegal aliens and other disadvantaged people especially in the non-western nations. During the 1980's "Operation Rescue" events took place when Christians illegally occupied abortion clinics to prevent the act of killing unborn children. Proponents of this kind of civil disobedience and active resistance usually limit the use of force to self-defense.

If peaceable acts of civil disobedience and active resistance fail to change permissible, gross evil laws, then some within this model advocate the use of subversive force (not uncontrolled violence) to change the law or in extreme cases even replace the form of the government. These advocates argue the state can abrogate its ruling authority and thus forfeit its legitimate mediated authority from God. If a government so comprehensively fails to restrain evil that it incarnates evil itself, advocates then argue for active non-peaceful resistance to

permissible immoral laws. Advocates of this paradigm do not advocate anarchy but rather seek to replace an evil government with another form of government.

The weakness in this position entails a lack of legitimate Scriptural examples of Christians exercising civil disobedience over laws that merely *permit* immoral practices to exist. Roman law permitted gross acts of sexual perversion, abortion, infanticide and euthanasia. Jesus and the New Testament authors clearly referred to these acts and thereby the laws that permitted them as immoral and sinful. However they did not advocate civil disobedience for laws that permitted immoral practices. John the Baptist himself was beheaded due to his insistence regarding the exclusivity and sanctity of marriage (Matt 14:1-12).

The contrast between two early documents of antiquity illustrates this tension between avoiding immoral practices vs. practicing civil disobedience to prevent others from practicing immorality. An ancient letter from a laborer (or perhaps soldier), Hilarion to his wife Alis illustrate the irreprehensible immoral practice of killing children. “I beg and entreat you, take care of the little one, and as soon as we receive our pay, I will send it up to you.... [and] if by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if a girl, *expose it*.”<sup>21</sup> The Romans and Greeks did not view a child as a human life until the father acknowledged that a child was part of the family—this usually occurred through some type of religious ceremony. If the child was unwanted, that family *exposed* the child to the natural elements until death. The *Didache* served as a kind of discipleship catechism primarily for non-Jewish converts: “you shall not kill a child in the womb nor expose infants”<sup>22</sup> This comparison merely serves as an example that some Christians in the very early church did not practice civil disobedience over laws that permitted immorality. They did however resist practicing immoral laws themselves and in the instance of the heinous

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<sup>21</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, William B Eerdmans: Grand Rapids (1987), 60. Also see Stephanie West, “Whose Baby? A Note on P. Oxy. 744.” In *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* Bd. 121, (1998), 167-172. (Published by: [Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn \(Germany\)](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20190208)) Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20190208>. And Chrys C. Caragounis, “Hilarion’s Letter to his Wife Alis (P Oxy 744): A New Suggestion to Solve Its Problem” (<http://www.chrys-caragounis.com/Inscriptions.and.Papyri/Hilarion%20Letter.pdf>) accessed Jan 8, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas O’Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 162.

practice of *exposure*, they protested against such treatment until the practice was eventually outlawed in some cities.<sup>23</sup>

The Scriptures are silent in respect to the populace usurping one form of government for another government. However if a government so comprehensively fails in its Scriptural mandate, then questions of broader political civil disobedience must be addressed and not simply acts of Christian civil disobedience. If a government does incarnate evil and comprehensively fail in its Scriptural mandate, rarely are immoral laws neatly divided between what is *permitted* and what is *prescribed* of its citizens and in many cases the government itself will be in violation of its own laws and legal-standing. If a government violates its own constitutional, legal charter then opposition is not civil disobedience since the citizenry is merely enforcing the true laws of that government.<sup>24</sup>

#### Civil disobedience against unjust *prescribed* laws

The Scriptures is replete with examples of believers who practiced civil disobedience when a government mandate or binding law required a believer to disobey God's revealed normative, word or when a government or legal mandate sought to prohibit a believer from obeying God's revealed, normative word. In each case, examples illustrate that: 1) civil disobedience was specific to an unjust prescribed law and not all the laws of government; 2) believers who disobeyed governments were generally willing to accept the associated penalty and/or they would flee the oppressive government. Note the following examples:

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<sup>23</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 60.

<sup>24</sup> One primary example revolves around the nomenclature of "The American Revolutionary War" vs. the "War for Independence." The American colonies had developed their own independent governments from England. According to most colonial charters from England they had every legal and lawful right to exist and manage their own affairs independent from England. As the colonies grew, England violated its own laws of the land (e.g., *Magna Carta* in 1215 A.D., the Petition of Right in 1628 and the English Bill of Rights in 1649) as well as many of the initial charters to the colonies. The colonies received their charters from the Crown in England though later England's Parliament sought to illegally asserts its authority over the colonies. The early colonists reminded both the Crown and Parliament many times of this illegal act and most Colonies refused to accept the Parliaments authority over the colonies. *The Declaration of Independence* documents many of these violations. In 1689, the Parliament gained supremacy over the Crown and declared the colonies which had been under the Crown's protection would now be viewed as foreign enemies and thus England removed their protection of the colonies. The War of Independence was actually a war to enforce and re-establish their legal status as independent colonies-the founding fathers were not rebels or anarchists. See John Eidsmoe, *God and Caesar: Christian & Political Action* (Westchester, IL: Crossway books, 1984), 29-35, esp. 34-35.

1. The Hebrew midwives refused to obey the king of Egypt to kill newborn male children (Exod 1:15-22) thus they feared God and obeyed the specific Abrahamic promise to not curse Abram or his offspring (Gen 12; 15).
2. Moses refused the Pharaoh's direct order to leave and deprive the Hebrews who were in Egyptian slavery (Exod 5:4-23) thus specifically obeying God's command (Exod 3).
3. Rahab directly disobeyed the command from the king of Jericho to produce the two Israelite spies who had entered the city to gain intelligence. Rather, she helped them escape (Joshua 2) thereby obeying the Abrahamic promise to bless the Hebrews (Gen 12; 15).
4. Obadiah (King Ahab's attendant) who "feared the Lord greatly" refused to obey Queen Jezebel's policy to kill the prophets (1 Kings 18:3-13) but rather he provided refuge for the prophets.
5. Jeremiah publicly defied King Zedekiah's plans to fight against the Babylonians (Jer 38:1-5).
6. Daniel and friends refused to eat the food that was ceremonially unclean (Daniel 1).
7. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego disobeyed Nebuchadnezzar's law of self-worship and idolatry as they explain, "we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan 3:4-18).
8. Daniel disobeyed King Darius's thirty day law prohibiting prayer to any deity other than to king Darius (Dan 6:10).
9. The Magi disobeyed King Herod and did not report to him the location of baby Jesus (Matt 2:8-13).
10. Jesus and the disciples repeatedly disobeyed the religious authorities whom Rome granted authority to rule. The Sanhedrin was the supreme ruling council in Jerusalem. Roman authorities authorized this council adjudicate many Jewish matters hence this council was an extension of Roman authority and not simply a religious authority. Peter and John disobeyed the Sanhedrin's specific charge to stop preaching Jesus. Luke writes that the Sanhedrin "commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.'" (Acts 4:18-20).
11. Peter and the apostles responded to the Sanhedrin's directives, "We must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:27-29).
12. Tribulation believers will refuse to worship the Antichrist who will have "authority over every tongue, tribe, nation" (Rev 13:7).

In each instance limited acts of civil disobedience became necessary when the governing law (or government-empowered authorities) required a believer to disobey God's revealed, normative

truth or when the government sought to prohibit a believer from obeying God's revealed normative truth through His word. In each case, the law or governing authority clearly and directly mandated a violation of God's normative truth in His word such as advocating murder, prohibiting the prayers and worship of God, prohibiting the preaching in Jesus name, etc. These unjust civil commands demanded limited, specific, non-violent acts of civil disobedience.

### Summary Comments on Civil Disobedience

Unqualified, absolute obedience and worship is reserved for God alone lest the government be idolatized and believers forfeit their calling to worship and glorify God alone. The Scripture prescribes civil disobedience when governing authorities *require* a believer to disobey God's revealed word or when government *prohibits* a believer from obeying God's revealed word. There must be a clear government law requiring the violation of God's normative direct pronouncement in Scripture. Civil disobedience must be based upon clear normative *precepts* and not simply principles of truth and never passions of the moment. Christians should not romanticize persecution or civil disobedience. The believer should exercise great caution in disobeying government and should prayerfully examine all of God's counsel, seek godly counsel, seek wise legal counsel and exhaust all appeals. Any act of civil disobedience must be rooted in an acceptance that God sovereignly rules and He expresses that rule through various intermediaries including evil men. Consequently, civil disobedience is not legitimate if only based on the immorality of civil leaders or immorality of a government.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates the profound difference between the LORD ruling through intermediaries when compared to His direct theocratic rule in the future Kingdom-age. There is no correspondence between Messianic Kingdom-age particularities of peace, harmony, justice, judgement, spiritual realities, etc. when compared to the current dimension of how the LORD rules through intermediaries hence the Messianic Kingdom-age has not yet come.