

THE CHURCH IN GOD'S PLAN: ETERNAL, OR TEMPORARY?

It is thought by many that the church of Jesus' promise recorded at Matthew 16:18 was an unplanned substitute; a temporary arrangement. This stems from the false idea that he intended to establish the Messianic kingdom of Old Testament prophecy (the reestablishment of national Israel in this erroneous view) but was prevented from doing so when the Jewish people rejected him. Thus, it became necessary to leave the establishment of this kingdom to another time when Jesus would do a return engagement for another try. So, in place of what he, the Son of God, failed to plant the first time around, Jesus left the church as a temporary substitute; a historical parenthesis as it has been called by some.

This view is flawed in every point.

If Jesus had actually come to establish himself as a king over a resurrected national Israel dependent on the Jews acceptance of him, he could have done so as far as they were concerned. At one point they were ready to use force to make him their king (John 6:15).

Further, according to Jesus himself, the Messianic kingdom of Old Testament prophecy never envisioned an earthly reign of its Messiah over national Israel (John 18:36).

The Jews' rejection and crucifixion of Jesus by Roman hands did not prevent the accomplishment of God's purpose in sending him. To the contrary, it facilitated it. God would laugh at the combined efforts of Jews and Gentiles to frustrate the coronation of his Son (Psalms 2:4-6). The Son's death would be sacrificial, freeing man from sin (Isaiah 53:1f). And it, coupled with his resurrection, would fulfill everything foretold concerning him in the Old Testament—including the establishment of his kingdom (Luke 18:31-33; 24:44-49).

What part, then, does the church play in God's plan? Exactly the same as the kingdom because they are the same thing! (Cf., Matthew 16:18, 19; Colossians 1:13, 18; Hebrews 12:22-24, 28).

"But wouldn't this mean the church was eternal in God's plan?" Certainly! Though God's intentions were not fully known to man in the Old Testament, Jesus' coming revealed the church to be part and parcel of his gospel (Ephesians 3:1-6). Therefore, "To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21).