

GOD AND GOVERNMENT:
SHOULD A CHRISTIAN GO TO WAR?
April 21, 2002

INTRO: Our study of God and government in the Old Testament, though but a brief overview, has been completed. What did we see? Government was one of the first divine institutions on earth. When mankind was few in number, we had the rule of the patriarchs, the fathers. When mankind increased, God raised up judges and we had what we would call a theocracy, rule by God. Then the people became dissatisfied and requested a king, and we had the beginning of the monarchy. Some 400 years later, because of Israel's failure to rule in a godly way, God removed all secular leadership from them, and gave it into the hands of ungodly Gentiles. Could God have allowed it so because, as Jesus said, "...the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light"? However that may be, God permitted that all secular governing authority would be in the hands of the unsaved world for 600 years until the time of Christ, and far beyond that.

Now you might say, "Well, if the children of this world are wiser than the children of light and God has assigned secular government to them, why does He not assign sacred government to them as well? Well, the OT clearly answers that question. In the days of the Judge and prophet Eli, the Philistines gathered against Israel (1 Sam. 4). And Israel was defeated by the Philistines and the Israelites said, "Let us get the ark of God, it will protect us." And so they brought the ark of God into battle and the Philistines defeated them and took the ark. That is one of the darkest days of Israel's history (See 1 Sam. 4:1-11).

The Philistines set the ark in the house of their God, Dagon. And in the morning they found Dagon flat on his face, and he was a little shook up. So they set their god up and the next morning he is on his face again. You see, that which is truly sacred does not belong among unbelievers. And then the Philistines began to break out in tumors and the hand of the Lord was hard upon them. So they said, "What are we going to do?" So they sent the ark to Gath, one of their five major cities. Then God struck the men of that city with tumors. So they sent the ark to Ekron and the Ekronites said, "What, have you brought the ark here to kill us too?" And when many people died and the

rest were stricken with tumors, they said, "Let's get rid of this thing."

So they called their religious people together and said, "What shall we do? How shall we send the ark to its place?" You see, the secular world had to learn that the true sacred realm did not belong to them. And the religious leaders said, "If you send it back, do not send it back empty. By all means send an offering with it."

And so, they said, "Make a new cart. Hitch two milk cows to it that have never had a yoke on their necks and take their calves away from them and leave them at home." Now you farmers tell me what would happen if you tried that? Well, they did this, and amazingly, the cows headed straight for Israel, lowing and bawling as they went. And the Philistines followed the cart in wonder. And in Bethshemesh, in Israel they were in the wheat harvest. And lo and behold, several cows and a cart with no driver are making their way to Jerusalem. And on closer inspection, well, you know what they found. What is the lesson? The sacred does not belong to the ungodly. When they place themselves in authority over the sacred, God gets angry! Amen and amen! Well, there are a number of lessons to be learned from the account of how the ark got back to Jerusalem, such as the killing of Uzzah because he reached out his hand to steady the ark. But the lesson we learn most clearly as related to our studies is that the sacred things do not belong to the unsaved world.

One of the phrases we will need to become familiar with as we look at the NT is the phrase, "the separation of Church and state". It is generally viewed that the idea of separation of church and state, or secular and sacred government began with Christianity. Let me read you an interesting quote from the Encyclopedia Britannica on an article called, "Church and State". It reads, "It would not be strictly accurate to say that the distinction between church and state was created by Christianity, even though it was largely responsible. The process began in Judaism, with the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, after which the Jews ceased to exist as an independent political community (except briefly under the Maccabees)" (Macropedia vol IV:590).

Well, we are ready to look at a new time period and so we look at God and government after the time of Christ.

II. AFTER CHRIST

A. During The Church Age

We have considered several ages of government before the time of Christ. After the time of Christ there are four ages of government to consider yet with regard to God and government. They are the Church age, the tribulation, the millennium and the time of the new heaven and the new earth. We begin by looking at the Church age.

1. Historical information

Under the title of historical information I want to give a brief summary of God and government from the time of the birth of Christ to the year 2002. Then we will look at present Christian views of God and government and then I want to give you my own position.

a. Transition to the church age (30-33AD)

1) Secular

I view the time from when God removed authority over the secular realm from Israel until the Church began as a transition time to a new age. When Christ was born and then began His ministry, He brought the transition time to a close. After He ascended to heaven, a new age began, an age we call the Church age.

-Who governed secular life in Israel when Christ was born? Turn with me to Luke chapter 2. Notice how the beginning of the story of the birth of Christ begins (read Luke 2:1). Notice that it tells us that when Jesus Christ was born, the whole world was under the governing authority of Caesar Augustus. Rome, the fourth world power since the Babylonian captivity, has come to power less than

a hundred years prior to this. And Caesar Augustus is ruler. (Read v. 2.) Now notice that the governor under Caesar Augustus, Quirinius was governor of Syria so he was over the region of Israel. (Read 3-5.) Notice further now in these verses that the Jews have to obediently follow the instructions of a Gentile ruler. (Read 6-11). Now notice ever so carefully what the Lord says in verse 11, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Between Luke 2:1 to Luke 3:1 almost 30 years have taken place. John the Baptist has already begun to preach and Jesus Christ is about to begin His ministry. By this time Caesar Augustus had died and Tiberius Caesar was in power. Pontius Pilate was the governor over Judea and Herod was the Tetrarch of Galilee. Lysanus was the tetrarch of Abilene. Now those are regions governed by the named men under the Roman Caesar. That tells us who the secular leaders were when John and Jesus began to preach.

-Now if you and I had been Jews at the close of the 400 silent years and we saw and understood the history of the Jews, what would we have expected to happen in secular government when the Messiah came? If we had read and studied 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and Psalm 89:36-37, what would we have expected? If we had been there when the angel came to Mary and had heard the words of Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:30-33 (read), what would we have expected? Would we not have been like the Jews who expected a Messiah who would set up the long promised Messianic kingdom? Consider the question of the disciples just before Jesus ascended

to heaven in Acts 1:6. Well, what did Jesus do with secular government when He came? The answer is that He did nothing! He didn't change a thing!

But what of Jesus' and political life? What was His view? Did He think He should get into politics and make a better world like that? Well, I want us to see His opportunities for that, should that have been His desire.

Let us consider first Matthew 4. Jesus' first hour of testing is coming to a close. He has not eaten for 40 days, and then the devil came to tempt Him. The first temptation was to turn stone into bread. The second was to cast Himself off the piccacle of the temple because the Bible says God will take care of Him. But look at the third temptation in Matthew 4:8-9. Here Jesus Christ is offered the leadership position of all the governing powers of the world. We would naturally say, "But look Lord, at what You could do if you were in political control." But note, for Christ to gain this political power, He must first bow the knee to the Devil. And if He did that, He would have lost before He started. Let us rest assured that Christ will defeat Satan, but not through political power.

In John chapter 6 Jesus Christ feeds 5000 people by a miracle. Look at the conclusion of the Jews in 6:14. "This is truly the Prophet who was to come into the world." They recognize Jesus from Moses' words in the Old Testament. Now look at what they want to do (6:15). What is Jesus' response: "He departed again to a mountain by Himself alone."

Turn with me to one more passage, Luke 12:13-14. Here someone wants Christ to settle a secular matter. But, as the Ryrie Reference Bible says, "Christ refused to assume the position of judge in this secular matter."

What was Christ's conclusion on secular government? We find it in Matthew 22. The Pharisees want to trap Jesus in a political trap. (Read 22:15-17). We might ask the question like this: "Does Rome truly have the right to collect taxes from us. Does Rome have the right to govern us in secular matters? Let me read Charles Ryrie's comment on this verse, "The tribute was a poll tax imposed by Rome on every Jew. The burning question in the minds of many Jews of that day was simply this: If God gave the land of Israel to the Hebrews, and if God meant them to live there, and if He received their sacrifices and offerings in acknowledgement of His relationship to them, how could they pay tribute to any other power, king, god, or person? If Christ said they should pay, they could then charge Him with disloyalty to Judaism; if He said no, they could denounce Him to the Romans."

Now look at Jesus' answer in (Matt. 22:18-21). In short, Jesus' answer is this: Caesar has a right to your taxes in the secular realm. Give him what belongs to him. On the other hand, Caesar does not have a right to that which belongs to God, the sacred realm. So, give to Caesar what is his and to God what belongs to God.

"But", you might ask, "Did Jesus not recognize that unsaved leaders are ungodly people?" Look for a moment at Luke 13:31-33. Oh, He knew. But He

also confirms in this passage that the secular will not stop the work of God. God's work will be accomplished in spite of ungodly secular leaders. Look at this again in John 19:10-11. You see, the secular realm, though in the hands of the ungodly, is still ultimately dependent on God.

Permit me to ask one final question here: Why did Jesus Christ taken no interest in political opportunities? Turn with me to John 18:36 for the answer. Jesus Christ's kingdom is not a political entity. It is a spiritual kingdom. He will accomplish His greatest work in the world, not through secular leadership, but through spiritual work.

2) Sacred

But what of sacred leadership. Who was in leadership in the sacred realm during the time of Christ? Well, Scripture is careful to tell us (look at Luke 3:2). It tells us that Annas and Caiaphas were the High Priests. Did they have two high priests? No. Caiaphas was high priest since 15 AD. But Annas had been high priest before Caiaphas. The governor Quirinius had appointed Annas as High Priest. In AD 15 Valarius Gratus deposed him. But he was the father-in-law to Caiaphas and thus exerted much influence on the present High Priest. Remember that the High Priest is the head of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious governing system.

What does this tell us? What we have is a state run religious system. The secular government determined who the religious leaders were. It is like the state church we will see in later church history. It would be as if the

Alberta government chose all church pastors. The Roman government gave considerable religious freedom to the Jews but they were subject to Rome. And so, with regard to sacred government, we are in a time in which the state determines who is in charge in sacred matters.

There are two great faults in sacred government at this time. First, the secular world dictated to the sacred world what they could or could not do and who their leaders were. Second, the religious leaders of the day were far off track spiritually. In most meetings between Jesus and the spiritual leaders, Jesus is at odds with them. In Matthew 23 we have Jesus' denunciation of these leaders. John the Baptist took the same dim view of the religious leaders of the day (Matt. 3:5-7). And so, sacred government in Jesus' day, though highly organized, is in spiritual ruin.

Our question then is: What did He do to sacred government? Did He throw out the corrupt sacred government? No, He did not throw it out but He did shake it up. Three times He cleansed the temple. On numerous occasions He confronted the Scribes or Pharisees or Saducees. However, His main effort was to call the nation to repentance. His main interest had to do with the sacred world, with spiritual matters. And the final result was that the nation rejected Him as Messiah and eventually crucified Him.

And when one studies the Gospels and Acts and then the Epistles one finds that Christ accomplished a very interesting task. He ascended to heaven 40 days after His resurrection.

And just before He ascended His disciples said, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Their question had to do with the secular realm. But look carefully at His answer. He is not so interested in the secular as He is in the sacred. He said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 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." There we have it. There is the mandate for the age that would be ushered in when they received Holy Spirit power. That age began in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost when the Church was born. And we read not one word of instruction that the responsibility of the Church is related to secular government. We do see very clearly, however, that the mandate of the Church is evangelical. It is the Gospel, the sacred realm that belongs to the Church.

So what did the Messiah do in the sacred realm? He bypassed the Jewish system entirely, and began an entirely new sacred system! That system is headed up by the Church, of which much more needs to be said than our series permits although it is this topic that will take up much of our time in God and government.

The final outcome of the spiritual state of Israel was that they, along with the secular government, crucified Christ.

CONCL: And so, in conclusion, as I view it, the life of Christ brings to a completion the time of transition begun when God removed authority in the secular realm from Israel

in 586 BC. And in the secular realm, He makes no changes. The unsaved world remains in authority over secular matters. However, in the spiritual realm, an entirely new institution is begun. It is the Church. The Church will remain God's major tool for His work for at least 2000 years. And so we will see in our next message what the relationship has been between the secular and the sacred from the time of Christ until our day.

For many years already we have seen a troubled world. Jesus said in Matthew 24:6, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Sometimes when I hear the news I feel like I'm ready to pull out my hair in frustration at the wrong that goes on. Then I have to remind myself of Jesus' words and realize that God is still on the throne. I can commit my life to Him and rest assured that He does all things well. You see, our well being as Christians does not depend on the stock market or such like. Our well being is in the hands of God.