

DOCTRINE 1

UNIT NINE THE GOD WHO RULES HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

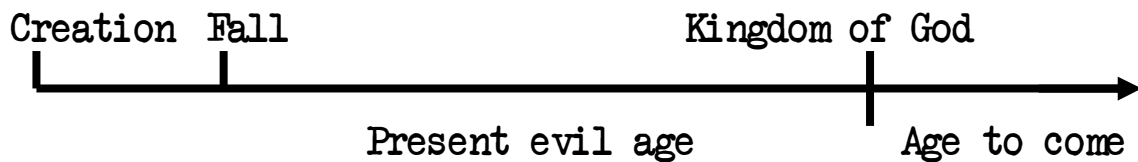
- ↳ The promise of the Old Testament finds its fulfilment in the New Testament – but only partially.
- ↳ Many people do acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus, but there is still more that must happen before everyone recognises him.
- ↳ We live between the first and second comings of Jesus.

THE COMING OF THE LAST DAYS

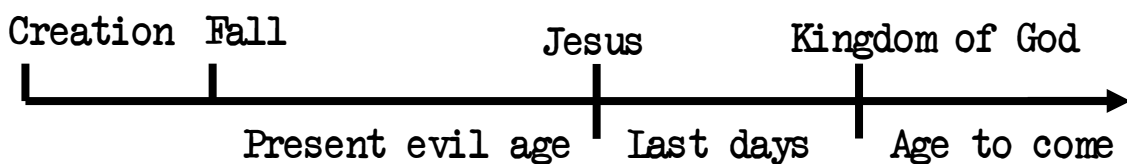
- ↳ Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was near.
- ↳ Some may have thought that Jesus was announcing the last days, the new creation and God's perfect rule in righteousness.
- ↳ These results have not emerged – was Jesus mistaken?

- ↳ Jesus was actually announcing the real coming of the kingdom but not its complete arrival.
- ↳ Against expectations, the coming of the kingdom was not immediately public, universal and decisive.
- ↳ The last days had arrived, but not the Last Day.
- ↳ The most important event in the introduction of the kingdom was to occur through the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.
- ↳ Jesus was identified as a king, but told Pilate “my kingdom is not of this world”.
- ↳ Jesus’ death is the turning point of history – much more is going to happen, but the most significant event has happened.
- ↳ The apostles preached the kingdom of God, but more often preached “Jesus Christ as Lord” – if we accept this we enter the kingdom of God.

Expectations of the Jews before the coming of Jesus.



Since the coming of Jesus we need to add a new factor.



↳ We are living still in the 'present evil age', but have also experienced blessings of the age to come.

↳ The 'last days' we are in have endured for many years, but their duration does not matter.

↳ God has done his great redeeming work and has introduced salvation.

↳ One of the great Old Testament expectations was that God would send his Spirit.

↳ On the day of Pentecost, Peter announced that the outpouring of the Spirit had occurred.

THE NATURE OF THE LAST DAYS

↳ It is essential for us to have a good understanding of the time in which we live – the last days have lasted for 2,000 years and may continue for a long time to come!

↳ The following characteristics can be noted about the last days:

↳ Finality of the Revelation in Jesus

- Hebrews 1:1-2 makes a distinction between how God spoke to people in the past and how he speaks through his Son.
- Jesus is not simply another part of the progressive revelation of the Old Testament.
- Jesus is the culmination of the earlier revelation.

↳ The Presence of the Signs

- Speculation on the timing of the end of all things has been a feature of Christian history.
- Jesus warned of deceivers, and of the “birth pains” which had to happen before the end.
- People who speculate often see these things in their own time and warn of the imminent return of Christ.
- However we are already in the last days and these signs are already with us, so it is better to be constantly alert and ready for the event.

↳ The Preaching of the Gospel

- Throughout what remains of this age we may expect the preaching of the gospel to continue – we should see ourselves as part of this task.
- Gospel preaching will be accompanied by persecution.
- Before the second coming there will be a specially evil ‘false christ’.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE LAST DAYS

↳ Many errors amongst Christians arise from a lack of understanding about where we are in God's timetable.

↳ Some look at the problems of the present experience, others try to bring forward promises which are to come.

↳ The power of God is controlled by the plan of God, and there are good reasons why we do not yet experience all that he promises to us.



Opposition: The Flesh

- In many places, the Bible refers to our continual tendency to sin.
- Paul refers to this tendency as 'the flesh' – an inherent evil bias which spawns evil desires, thoughts and actions.
- Christians are no longer controlled by the flesh – but it still exists in us, we feel its pull towards sin and need forgiveness.



Opposition: The World

- There is solidarity in sin - those who are 'in Adam' encourage each other in rebellion against God.
- The Bible refers to this as 'the world', and shows this to be in direct opposition to God (James 4:4).
- The world continues to be a source of temptation and we must be alert to this.



Opposition: Satan

- Paul says that before people were saved, they followed the 'ruler of the kingdom of the air' (Ephesians 2:2).
- Jesus described Satan as a 'murderer from the beginning', responsible for the temptation of Adam and Eve.
- Satan always tempts and tests people, even when his power over them is broken.



Opposition: Suffering

- Very few human lives are marked by contentment and happiness throughout.
- The Bible understands suffering as a result of the fall – not necessarily related to personal sin but to our rebellion as a race.
- Suffering poses a great test to faith – those who say Christians should never be sick have misunderstood the gospel.

↪ Opposition: Death

- Some philosophies regard death as a natural thing, the Bible shows it to be a penalty imposed by God on sinners.
- It is the final earthly consequence of our rejection of God's kingdom.
- If we forget that our salvation comes through Jesus and try to rely on our own works, we make death something to fear.

↪ Blessing: The Gospel

- The gospel changes everything – bringing peace with God and the forgiveness of sins.
- The gospel deals with sin by destroying its power to hurt us – we serve a new Lord.
- Our failures remain – our constant recourse is to the forgiveness that God provides for us in Christ.

↪ Blessing: The Spirit

- Jesus promised his apostles that the Father would send them the Spirit of truth – through the Spirit both Father and Son come to the believer.
- The Spirit opens our eyes to the truth of the gospel, by the Spirit we recognise the truth about Jesus and call him Lord.
- The Spirit unites us with fellow Christians in fellowship - the Bible emphasises the work of the Spirit in Gentiles to show the Jews that God has accepted them.
- When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives a struggle against the flesh begins – the Spirit produces in our lives the 'fruit' for which he is notable.

- ↳ Blessing: Prayer
 - Since God is our Father and he rules the world, we are encouraged to call on him frequently in prayer.
 - There is no greater evidence of our trust in God than our prayers to him – if we feel in control we may become idle in prayer.
 - Prayer is also evidence of our love for others, gaining no personal reward.

CONCLUSION

- ↳ We are living in the 'last days' between the first and second coming of Jesus.
- ↳ It is an era of difficulty, even in Christian lives.
- ↳ God has not left us – by his Spirit he upholds and strengthens us, and fills our hearts with hope for the day when Christ will return.