

WHAT “THE KINGDOM OF GOD” IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

THE CENTRAL SUBJECT OF CHRISTIANITY

W.C. Allen, MA, Prof. of OT at Oxford, said concerning the Kingdom of God:

The Kingdom — the central subject of Christ's doctrine ... The Kingdom he taught was coming, but not in his lifetime. After His ascension he would come as Son of Man on the clouds of heaven ((Matt.) 16:27, 19:28, 24:30; 25:31) and would sit on the throne of His glory... Then the twelve Apostles would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). In the meantime he himself must suffer and die and be raised from the dead. How else could he come on the clouds of heaven?

The Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels Vol. II, p. 145

Now there is a remarkable difference between that biblical view of the Kingdom and what was substituted for it in post-biblical times when the original understanding of the Kingdom was massively altered. Greeks rather than Jews became leaders of Christianity and they began to use pagan Greek philosophy to form their teachings. From that point there have developed 3 particular false explanations as to what the Kingdom is:

1. The Kingdom is an ethical rule in one's heart.
2. The kingdom is the Church.
3. The Kingdom is paradise in heaven.

1. THE KINGDOM IS NOT AN ETHICAL RULE IN ONE'S HEART

THE “WITHIN YOU” AND “NEEDING NO SIGN” TEACHING

Typical but misleading renderings of Jesus' words in *Luke 17:20-21* are:

- “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming **with signs to be observed**, nor will they say, ‘Look here it is!’ or ‘There!’ For behold, the Kingdom of God is **in your midst of you.**” (*ESV also see the NASB*)
- “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come **with observation**; nor will they say, ‘See *here!*’ or ‘See *there!*’ For indeed, the Kingdom of God is **within you**’” (*NKJV also see KJV*)

TRANSLATION POINTS:

1. The phrase “**with signs to be observed**” in the ESV and NASB should be rendered as: “*the kingdom of God is not coming with observation*” or “*with your careful observation*” (NIV). This is the correct rendering according to Greek lexicons and the UBS interlinear text. The phrase “**with signs**” is not in the Greek.
2. The phrase “**within you**” in the NKJV and KJV should contextually be translated as: “*the kingdom of God is in the midst of (Gk. entos) you*” or “**among you.**” (Also see ISV, NRSV, NAB, NET, NJB, REB, HCSB, NIV 2011, Moffatt, and Rotherham).

So Darby (1890) captures both aspects correctly as:

- “...he answered them and said, The kingdom of God does not come with **observation**; nor shall they say, Lo **here**, or, Lo **there**; for behold, the kingdom of God is **in the midst of you.**” (Darby and see Rotherham).

So Jesus is here saying to the Pharisees that they do not have to go looking (i.e. “with observation”)

here or there for the kingdom because when it arrives it will be very evident to everyone just as the king of the kingdom Jesus, standing in their midst, is very **evident to** and **within the grasp of** the Pharisees.

Next and for his disciples only, Jesus develops that thought with the use of a simile which shows that the coming of the kingdom will be as **evident as lightning**:

- ❖ “Then He said **to the disciples**, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, ‘Look **here!**’ or ‘Look **there!**’ Do not go after them or follow them. For **as the lightning that flashes** out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day” (Luke 17:22-24).

So verse 20 does not mean that the kingdom will not be coming without an observable physical sign. If that is what Jesus had meant then he would have been contradicting all that he said in the Olivet Discourse where the **visible sign** is:

- ❖ “When you **see** the desolating abomination, standing where he should not” (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains” (Mark 13:14 NAB)

If the Kingdom is simply a spiritual state in one’s heart how could the Scriptures possibly state that, after the ministry of Jesus, **Joseph of Armithea** was still “*waiting for the Kingdom*” (Mark 15:43).

PHYSICAL AS WELL AS SPIRITUAL CONDITIONS IN THE KINGDOM

Based on the words of Romans 14:17 some might argue that the Kingdom concerns only the spiritual qualities within Christians:

- ❖ “For the **kingdom of God** is *not a matter of eating and drinking* [i.e. regulations of the Mosaic Law] but of **righteousness** and **peace** and **joy** in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

However, a number of Scriptures demonstrate also the physical nature of the Kingdom including:

- ❖ “and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may **eat and drink** at my table **in my kingdom** and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29, 30).

Shailer Matthews, D.D., Professor of Theology, Chicago Seminary shows that the Kingdom is not primarily about ethical ideals:

So far from the eschatological Kingdom of God being a secondary element in the early church, *it is its great conditioning belief*. The preaching of the first evangelists **was not a call to ethical ideals** or an argument as to certain truths. Rather it was the proclamation of a Message.

The Messianic Hope in the New Testament, pp. 144.

2. THE KINGDOM IS NOT THE CHURCH

Another of the alterations made concerning the Kingdom was to the idea that the church itself and the kingdom were one and the same thing. This just cannot be so because:

CHRISTIANS ARE HEIRS OF THE KINGDOM BUT NOT HEIRS OF THE CHURCH

- ❖ *Christians are* “...chosen...to be...heirs of the kingdom” (James 2:5).

So it is impossible for a person to be an **heir** of a particular thing and to be its **possessor** at the same time. Christians actually are the church; whereas because the kingdom is an inheritance they do not yet possess it.

THE FUTURE INHERITING AND ENTERING OF THE KINGDOM

- ❖ *This will occur* “when the Son of Man comes in his glory” ... *Christians will* “**inherit the kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (*Matt. 25:31, 34*).
 - ❖ “...**there will be** richly provided for you **an entrance into** the eternal *kingdom* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (*1 Pet. 2:11*).
- These are existing believers, i.e. part of the church; yet they will inherit and enter the kingdom in the future. Hence the kingdom cannot be the church.*

THE CHURCH IS ‘FLESH AND BLOOD’

Yet Paul said that:

- ❖ “...**flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom** of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (*1 Cor. 15:50*).

So because flesh and blood persons constitute the church, but cannot inherit the kingdom, the church cannot be the Kingdom. And theologian Hans Conzelmann states:

It cannot really be disputed that Luke means by the Kingdom **a future** entity. The spiritualizing interpretation according to which the Kingdom is present in the Spirit and in the Church is completely misleading...It is *the message* of the Kingdom that is present, which in Luke is distinguished from the Kingdom itself. He knows nothing of an immanent [i.e., already present] development on the basis of the preaching of the Kingdom,
The Theology of St. Luke, p. 122.

3. THE KINGDOM IS NOT PARADISE IN HEAVEN

When the Kingdom did not come within the first few centuries after Jesus’ ascension the church officials made the change of what was meant by the kingdom. They changed it to the idea that at the moment a Christian dies he departs for heaven which is the Kingdom. Apart from this idea being based on a further unbiblical view of a soul that lives on after death, is this idea even vaguely connected to God’s promises to the faithful?

THE KINGDOM IS ABOUT THE EARTH AND BLESSING OF THE NATIONS

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that:

- ◆ The coming Kingdom of God will be set up on earth with a returned Jesus as King in the literal Jerusalem of the future.
- ◆ Jesus, with his associate rulers, will immediately set about the task of bringing about paradise conditions so that all war, crime, poverty and pollution are steadily eradicated. Increasingly the nations will be living in harmony.

But first we must look at the background.

THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

An examination of the promises made to the ancestors of the Jews all concerned the earth and there is never any promise of going to heaven:

- ❖ “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached **the gospel beforehand to Abraham**, saying, ‘In you shall all *the nations be blessed*’” (*Gal. 3:8*).
- ❖ “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be **heir of the world...**” (*Rom. 4:13*).

THE SAME PROMISES TO THE ANCESTORS WERE ALSO FOR CHRISTIANS

- ❖ “Now I say that **Jesus Christ** has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, **to confirm the promises made to the fathers...**” (*Rom. 15:8*).

When we refer to **God's promises** in Genesis (12:2, 3; 13:14-17; 17:7, 8; 26:2-4; 28:13-14) as given to the forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we find that the promises are about *inheriting the land, producing progeny and being a blessing to all nations*:

- ❖ “Dwell in this land, and I will be with you [**Jacob**] and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give *all these lands*, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and **in your seed all the nations** of the earth shall **be blessed**” (*Gen. 26:3-4*).

ABRAHAM AND OTHERS HAVE YET TO RECEIVE THE PROMISES

This was shown by Steven in his address to the Sanhedrin (*High Council of the Jews*) and later by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews:

- ❖ “[**God**] moved him [**Abraham**] to this land in which you now dwell. And **God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on**. But even when *Abraham* had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him” (*Acts 7:4b-5*).
- ❖ “These all [*including Abraham*—vs. 8, 9] died in faith, **not** having received the **promises**, but having seen them afar off were assured of them” (*Heb. 11:13*).

CHRISTIANS HAVE THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISES

- ❖ “...that *the blessing of Abraham* might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith ... Now to Abraham and his Seed were **the promises** made ... And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:14, 16, 29*).

So the entire thrust of God's promises to faithful Hebrews who anticipated Christ, as well as Christians as “Abraham's seed” contain no promise of going to heaven. It is only by misapplication of a few phrases used by Paul that the pagan Greek notion of going to heaven was adopted by 2nd century Christians (Please see STUDY 6).

THE MEANS TO FULFIL THE PROMISES

To fulfil those promises of land, progeny and blessing of the nations Yahweh promised a **Messianic prophet** (Deut. 18: 15-19) ruling as **king** over a **concrete kingdom** (2 Sam. 7: 12-19, 2 Chron. 17:13-14) to bless the nations and to turn the earth into paradise. All of this describes fully what was being offered to Christians and is what Christ verified.

THE KING WILL RULE ON EARTH

- ❖ “May he [**Messiah**] rule...to the ends of **the earth**” (*Ps. 72:8 NASB*).
- ❖ “...he [**Messiah**] shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness **in the land**” (*Jer. 23:5*).

JESUS' RULERSHIP IS IN LITERAL ISRAEL

- ❖ “...from you [**Bethlehem**] shall come forth to me one who is to be **ruler in Israel**” (*Micah. 5:2*).
- ❖ “Lord, will you at this time restore the **kingdom to Israel?**” (*Acts 1:6*).

Jesus did not correct the disciples as regards the location of the Kingdom, but only showed that the time of its appearance would not be known.

CHRISTIANS WILL RULE WITH JESUS AND ARE TO RULE ON EARTH

- ❖ “You know that the saints **will rule** {or: “manage” Moffatt} the world, don't you” (*1Cor. 6:2 ISV*)
- ❖ “...you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign **on the earth**”

(*Rev. 5:10*).

CHRISTIANS RECEIVE THE KINGDOM ON EARTH

- ❖ For Christians “theirs is **the Kingdom of heavens** ... they shall inherit the **earth**” (*Matt. 5:3, 5*).
- ❖ “Your **kingdom** come, your will be done, **on earth** as it is in heaven” (*Matt. 6:10*).

After discussing the *Parable of the Soils* in relation to the Kingdom... Professor W.C. Allen stated that:

There is nothing here nor elsewhere in this Gospel to suggest that **the scene of the Kingdom is other than the present world renewed**, restored and purified.

So here he shows that Matthew did not expect believers to ‘go to heaven,’ but that Jesus will return to the earth to rule with Christians on a renewed earth.

A POLITICAL KINGDOM FORETOLD

Some Christians do not like the thought of God’s kingdom as being a political entity. Many feel that the rulership of Jesus in their hearts is enough to steadily bring about world improvement. Apart from the Scriptures denying such a view, one only has to examine the **consistently deteriorating conditions** to realize that that is not God’s plan. Indeed His plan involves dramatic intervention and so requires a change to a world government:

- ❖ “...the stone [*The kingdom*] that struck the image [“on its feet” *therefore on earth*] became a great mountain and filled the whole *earth* ... The God of heaven will set up **a kingdom** that shall never be destroyed...It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end...” (*Dan. 2:34, 44*).

THE KINGDOM ABSORBES THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD

- ❖ “The **kingdom of the world** *has become* the **kingdom of our Lord** and of his Christ...” (*Rev. 11:15*).

JESUS GETS THE THRONE OF DAVID

Undoubtedly the term “the throne” means the rulership in the Davidic line and which kingship was entirely on earth as a government just as in the prophecies of the future Messiah:

- ❖ “The **government** will rest on his shoulders...**On the throne of David** and over his kingdom” (*Isa. 9:6, 7 NASB*).
- ❖ “When the Son of Man **comes in his glory**, and all the angels with him, then he **will sit on his glorious throne**. Before him will be gathered all the nations...” (*Matt. 25:31*).

Jesus is here prophesied to reign on David’s throne, which no Jew of the time would have imagined to be anywhere but on earth (Luke 1:32, 33). This totally excludes any thought of a Kingdom in heaven as further shown in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 1986 edition:

The coming of God’s kingdom is an eschatological event when the kingly reign of God...will be manifested on earth *de facto*, so that His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. This means two things: negatively, the judgement of the wicked and the **subjugation of every hostile power**; positively, the salvation of the righteous and the redemption of a fallen creation from the burden of evil.

DOESN'T “HEAVENLY JERUSALEM” MEAN THAT THE KINGDOM IS IN HEAVEN?

Regarding ‘Heavenly Jerusalem’ mentioned in Hebrews 12:22: the adjective *heavenly* is **qualitative** and is not referring to a location. It is a *present* condition of Christians just as in Ephesians 1:3 and 2:6. Hence the “*heavenly Jerusalem*” is the glorious city of the **future** which Christians have now approached. Nevertheless, Jesus spoke of it as “*Jerusalem...the city of the great King*” (*Matt. 5:35*). Revelation 21:10ff describes the “new Jerusalem” in all its glory further indicating that “heavenly” in Hebrews 12 is descriptive of Jerusalem rather than a statement about its location.

LITERAL JERUSALEM OF THE FUTURE WILL BE THE CAPITAL CITY OF THE KINGDOM

The fact is that we are to connect the arrival of the Kingdom with the future return of Jesus to literal Jerusalem:

- ❖ “[*Jesus*] proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because **they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately**. He said therefore, “A **nobleman** went into a far country to **receive for himself a kingdom and then return**. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas... When he **returned, having received the kingdom...**” (*Luke 19:11-12, 15*).
- ❖ “At that time *Jerusalem* shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all **nations shall gather to it...**” (*Jer. 3:17*).
- ❖ “Abraham...was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God ... they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (*Heb. 11:8-10, 16*).

All of this clearly shows that the beloved city heavenly **Jerusalem** will be on **earth** at the end of the Millennium. In confirmation of this Justin Martyr in his Dialog with Trypho said:

But I and others who are right-minded Christians on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a **thousand years in Jerusalem**, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah and others declare ... And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him that *those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem*; and that thereafter the general and eternal resurrection of all men would take place.

THE KINGDOM WILL BE A PARADISE ON EARTH

- ❖ “And the LORD God planted a garden [*Gk. paradeison*] in Eden, in the east” (*Gen. 2:8*).

*Also in Genesis 2:9; 2:10; 2:15; 3:2. The Greek Septuagint translates garden as “paradeisos.” These facts give us the definition of the word ‘paradise’ for the rest of the Scriptures. So living in such a future **earthly paradise** is what Jesus offered the dying criminal, Paul had a vision of, and is the promise in the Book of Revelation:*

THREE OCCURRENCES OF THE WORD ‘PARADISE’ IN THE NT

1. The *seditionist* hung next to Jesus pleads “...remember me when you come into your **kingdom!** He [*Jesus*] said to him... truly I say to you today, you will be *with me* in **paradise**” (*Luke 23:42, 43*). *Jesus here equates the Kingdom with paradise, and paradise was thought of by first century Jews, only as related to the earth.*

NOTE:

- “I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise.” *NWT*
- “I say unto thee this day: With me shalt thou be in paradise.” *Rotherham*
- “Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I assure you even today: you will one day be with me in Paradise.’ ‘Today’ probably belongs in the first part of the sentence.”

Das Neue Testament, translated by Wilhelm Michaelis

Commas were not used in Greek uncial manuscripts. Contextually any punctuation must come after the word “today.” The Greek adverb appears in the LXX and the NT 221 times. In 170 of these occurrences the adverb follows the verb it modifies e. g. in the OT “I say unto you today”; “I testify to you today” “as many as I command thee today, that ye may live” (*Deut 11:8*).

2. *Paul states that “...a man [probably himself]...was caught up to the third heaven ... this man was caught up to **paradise**” (2 Cor. 12:2, 4).*

This seems most likely to be the 3rd “heavens and earth” that Peter later described in 2 Peter 3:5, 7, 13 as new heavens and a new earth and was therefore Paul’s vision of the coming paradise on earth which John also describes.

3. *Jesus promises Christians*: “To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in **the paradise** of God” (Rev. 2:7).

The Scriptures consistently use the term paradise in a setting that is of the earth. There is no thought of it as being relocated to heaven.

THE KINGDOM BRINGS REGENERATION OF THE WORLD

- ❖ “And Jesus said to them: Truly I say to YOU...In **the regeneration** (*palingenesia*), when the Son of Man will sit down **on his glorious throne**...” (Matt. 19:28).

ESV renders “**the regeneration**” as: “in the new world,” NLT: “when the world is made new,” Barclay: “at the *rebirth of the world*,” thereby demonstrating the fact that improving conditions will begin to exist very soon after the kingdom is established. The **regeneration of the whole world** is synonymous with the Greek phrase *apokatastasis panton* meaning “**restoration of all things**” (Acts 3:21). This process begins when Jesus returns and establishes the kingdom:

- ❖ “...that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive **until** the period of **restoration of all things** (*apokatastasis panton*) about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (Acts 3:20, 21).

This is not the restoration only of true worship but of the restoration of “**things of which God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets of old time**” involving humanity in general and resulting in “*the new heavens and new earth*” (Isa. 65:17-25; 2 Peter 3:13). It is as when God say “I will make all things new” (Rev 21:5). So shortly after Jesus returns this restoration begins. Furthermore, it is logical that, after the establishment of the Kingdom and after dealing with his main enemies, Jesus would immediately bring into effect the processes to improve conditions in the world – for example world disarmament (Isa. 2:1-4). There would be no need for any decades’ long gap!

SUMMARY

Under the heading *The Kingdom of God*, Eduard Schweizer explains that:

When Jesus proclaims that the **Kingdom of God is near**, he is adopting a concept which was coined in the OT. Although it denotes God’s sovereignty over creation (Ps 103:19; 145:11ff.) it refers primarily to God’s unchallenged sovereignty **in the end time** (Isa 52:7).....Judaism spoke of the reign of God which comes after the annihilation of every foe and the end of all suffering.... In the NT the **Kingdom of God** is conceived first of all as something **in the future** (Mark 9:1, 47, 14:25; Matt. 13:41-43; 20:21; Luke 22:16, 18 I Cor 15:50. et al) which comes from God (Mark 9:1; Matt. 6:10; Luke 17:20; 19:11). Therefore it is something man can only wait for (Mark 15:43), seek (Matt. 6:33); receive (Mark 10:15; cp Luke 12:32) and inherit (I Cor 6:9f; Gal 5:21; James 2:5), but is not able to create it by himself Repentance is nothing less than a whole-hearted commitment to the Good News. *Good News According to Mark*, pp. 45, 47.

So now we can clearly identify those later church developments of the meaning of the Kingdom as false. The kingdom never refers to:

- an ethical rule in one’s heart or
- the Church, or
- paradise in heaven, but rather to the glorious paradise on earth to be brought about when Christ returns.

THE KINGDOM IS FUTURE

Although Paul in Colossians 1:13 says that Christians have been “transferred us to the Kingdom of [God’s] beloved Son” and so are experiencing the Kingdom now, the vast majority of texts show that the full experiencing of Kingdom is yet future. So what is meant by the statement in Colossians? Simply that Christians now live their lives in harmony with the precepts of the coming Kingdom. However, Jesus made it plain that the Kingdom in its full expression will arrive when he himself returns:

- ❖ “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, in the new world (*regeneration*), **when** the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’” (*Matt. 19:28*).
- ❖ “So also, when you see these things [*the Great Tribulation etc*] taking place, you know that **the kingdom of God is near**” (*Luke 21:31*).
- ❖ The parable of the Nobleman who goes “...to a far country”....*verse 23 indicates a long time lag: “why then did you not put my money in the bank, and **at my coming**, I might have collected it with interest”* (*Luke 19:11-27*).
- ❖ “For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine **until the kingdom of God comes**” (*Luke 22:18*).
- ❖ “The **kingdom of the world** *has become* the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ...” (*Rev. 11:15*) *at the second coming.*

So Christians must be patient while anticipating Jesus’ return to establish the Kingdom with its centre in Jerusalem.

THE MILLENNIAL PHASE OF THE ETERNAL KINGDOM —A TRANSITIONAL “NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH”

THE REMOVAL OF SATAN’S INFLUENCE

- ❖ “...an angel seized...Satan...and bound him for a thousand years...they (*of the 1st resurrection*) came to life and ruled as kings with Christ for a thousand years” (*Rev. 20:1, 2, 4*).

THE END OF NATIONAL WARS

- ❖ “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it...” (*Isa. 2:2ff*).

This is also shown by the parallel account in Micah:

- ❖ “It shall come to pass in the latter days ... ³He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid...” (*Micah 4:1, 4*).

JOY AND EXTRAORDINARILY LONG LIVES FOR THE MORTAL POPULATION

- ❖ “New Heavens and New Earth ... I create *Jerusalem* for rejoicing (***the capital of the kingdom will be on earth***)... no longer the voice of weeping ... no longer an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days (***natural death of mortals at very old ages still occurs in this quasi paradise***); for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought of as accursed. They will build houses, plant vineyards...for as the lifetime of a tree so will be the days of my people” (*Isa. 65:17-25 NASB*).

This phase of the Kingdom results in near paradise conditions of peace, joy, and abundance:

- ❖ ‘wolf/lamb; leopard/young goat; calf/young lion; cow/bear; a little boy will lead them’ (*Isa. 11:6-9*).
- ❖ “...the wicked one will be no more” (*Ps. 37:10*).
- ❖ “...the righteous will sprout, and abundance of peace” (*Ps. 72: 7*).
- ❖ “...plenty of grain” (*Ps. 72:16*).
- ❖ “...for all the peoples...a banquet of well oiled dishes” (*Isa. 25:6*).

Kingdom Paradise in its absolute fullest form comes after the second resurrection and judgment some time after the Millennium when there will be no more death of humankind. (Rev. 20-22)

WE GET A TASTE OF THE POWER OF THE KINGDOM NOW

Because of the many biblical descriptions of the coming Kingdom paradise contained in the Scriptures, and because of their fellowship with other believers, and because of having Christ in their lives as well as holy spirit, Christians now get a taste of life in that future Kingdom as the writer to the Hebrews stated:

- ❖ “...those who have once been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift...and have **tasted the ... powers** of the age to come” (*Heb. 6:4, 5 ESV*).
- ❖ “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness, and **transferred us to the kingdom** of his beloved Son” (*Col. 1:13*).

*Evidently the Kingdom existed in God’s and Jesus’ minds from before Paul’s time. So, all the realities of the future kingdom may be tasted now because Christians are no longer in the domain of darkness. Christians are metaphorically “**transferred**” out of Satan’s world. Furthermore we get a taste of the kingdom power when we read of the kind of abilities Jesus was granted:*

- ❖ “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I **cast out demons**, then *the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (*Matt. 12:28*).

MISAPPLIED TEXTS

Revelation 1:6 and 5:10:

“...and made us *a* kingdom, priests to his God and Father ... and you have made them ***a kingdom and*** priests...they **shall reign on the earth.**”

This is not “a kingdom of priests” as in Exodus 19:6, but rather it concerns two separate offices—kings and priests. Christians are to rule as kings with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12); but because Revelation, written around A.D. 96, concerns “things which must soon take place” these statements must be part of the prophetic pattern of the book of Revelation and therefore future. Furthermore, because Christians are to rule as kings with Jesus only from after their resurrection (Rev. 20:4) they cannot be kings before that future time. So while John views the church as ‘*a* kingdom’ in the sense that they will be kings, he is not saying that they are “the kingdom of God”—a future political entity of a spiritual nature. Additionally, Christians are not yet ruling “**on the earth**,”—something they would do the moment they become kings. For these reasons Revelation 1:6 and 5:10 do not indicate that the church is the kingdom.

FURTHER COMMENTS ON THE KINGDOM FROM BIBLICAL SCHOLARS

W.C. Allen, MA continues with:

And the disciples were to preach the Good News [Gospel] of the coming Kingdom (10:7, 24:14) among all nations making disciples by baptism (28:18). The body of disciples thus gained would naturally form a

society bound by common aims. Hence the disciples of the Kingdom would form a new spiritual Israel (21:43; [Cp. Gal. 6:16]).

Allen goes on to say:

In view of the needs of this new Israel of Christ's disciples, who were to await his coming on the clouds of heaven, it is natural that a large part of the teaching recorded in the Gospel should concern the qualifications required in those who hoped to enter the Kingdom when it came... Thus the parables convey some lesson about the nature of the Kingdom and the period of preparation for it. It should be sufficiently obvious that if we ask what meaning the parables had for the editor of the first Gospel, the answer must be that he chose them because... they taught lessons about the Kingdom of God *in the sense in which that phrase is used everywhere in the Gospel of the Kingdom which was to come, when the Son of Man came upon the clouds of heaven.*

Thus the Parable of the Sower illustrates the varying reception met with by the Good News [Gospel] of the Kingdom as it is preached amongst men. That of the tares also deals not with the Kingdom itself, but with the period of preparation for it. At the end of the age, the Son of Man will come to inaugurate His Kingdom...

In *Good News According to Mark*, Eduard Schweizer notes that:

Mark (1:14, 15) gives a brief summary of the preaching of Jesus. Preaching and Good News are Mark's favorite expressions. The call of Jesus is accurately summed up in 1:15, where the association of repentance and faith reveals the language of the church (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 20:21). Mark's concern is to make clear that in this preaching Jesus continues to go forth into the world and this call, therefore, is being directed also to the one who reads this Gospel today. Consequently this section serves as a caption to the whole gospel (cp. the epilogue). (pp. 45).

Ernest Scott, D.D. Prof of NT, Union Theological Seminary, NY, stated in 1931 that:

It seems almost impossible to define the Christian 'Gospel.' Sometimes it is identified with our religion as a whole, sometimes with some element in it which is regarded as central. To accept the Gospel is to believe in the atonement or the love of God, or the revelation in Christ or the fact of human brotherhood.

Yet it is well to remember that the word which is now used so loosely had, at the outset a meaning which was clearly understood. "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the KG is at hand." The Gospel underwent a marvelous development... but the Good News has always been essentially what it was at the first — **the announcement of the Kingdom**. It is evident from the manner in which Jesus made the announcement that he took up an idea which was already familiar. He did not explain what he meant by the Kingdom, for he could assume that all his hearers were looking forward to it. Their hope for it had been newly stimulated by John the Baptist... They had long been thinking of the Kingdom and wondering when it would come and a prophet had now arisen who declared that it was close at hand.... In the religion of Israel we must seek for the immediate origin of the Kingdom idea of Jesus... The idea persisted long after the royal house was firmly established that the reigning king was only the vice-regent of the invisible King.... Israel had been chosen by a unique God who was known as yet only by His own people, but was nonetheless King of the whole earth. The day was coming when all nations would own his sovereignty.... On the higher levels of prophecy the purified Israel of the future is conceived as attracting all nations by its high example, to the service of the One God. More often it is assumed that Israel when fully disciplined will be restored to God's favor and advanced by Him to the sovereign place (Acts 1:6). As King of this preeminent people God will reign at last over the world.... On the one hand God is already King. On the other hand it is recognized that the Kingship lies in the future... They look for a coming day when He will overcome all usurping powers and assert Himself as King. So the prophets keep before them the vision of a new age when the Kingdom of God will be fully manifested.. In that happy time Israel will be exalted, the cause of justice will be established, the earth full of the glory of the Lord. Nature in that day will be restored to its

pristine glory and the wolf will lie down with the lamb and cattle will feed in large pastures, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun. He [and His Messiah] will reign from Mount Zion and all nations will serve Him. King over a righteous nation he will extend his dominion over the whole earth. pp. 11-21

In the *Harper Collins, Bible Dictionary*:

The Gospel is the proclamation of the Kingdom announced by Jesus (Mark 1:14, 15) and now proclaimed by the church.

SUMMARY

- The Kingdom cannot be simply an ethical rule in one's heart because the biblical descriptions of it are of future world-changing events at the time of the return of Christ and his return will be seen just as dramatically as lightning is seen.
- The kingdom cannot be the Church because Christians actually are the church, but are currently **heirs** of the Kingdom and have yet to inherit and become possessors of it by a future entering into it. Furthermore, Christians as the church are currently "... **flesh and blood**" which "**cannot inherit the kingdom**" until they are granted immortality (*1 Cor. 15:50*).
- The Kingdom cannot be paradise *in heaven* because it is paradise *on earth* that is promised to all God's faithful people.

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SUGGESTED READING

The Theocratic Kingdom (3 volumes) by George N.H. Peters.

