

CHAPTER 8

THE KINGDOM

The facts surrounding the nature of God's Kingdom are an unending source of confusion among denominations. The problems center on two distinct issues. First, people seem to have all kinds of ideas about WHEN that Kingdom is to come. The other area of controversy is disagreement about WHERE that Kingdom is to be located.

For some, the Kingdom will come some time in our future. They say we cannot precisely know the date it will appear. Others have devised elaborate formulae for predicting the arrival date of the Kingdom.

For some, the Kingdom's location is Heaven. And others try to use the scriptures to show that the Kingdom will forever exist on the earth.

What follows is an extended dialogue. It represents an aggregate of many discussions with individuals having a variety of beliefs about the Kingdom. Out of these discussions will come the conclusion that God's Kingdom is the church. And after Christ's return, His Kingdom will be translated into heaven. The scriptures promulgated by the false teachers are studied and explained so that we can see the origins of their misperceptions.

VISITOR:

You can live forever as a part of the Kingdom that God will one day establish here on earth. That's a promise given to us in the Bible. All our needs will be taken care of and there'll be no more of the kind of suffering we so often see all around us today.

ME:

Your message sounds very appealing and reassuring. I know the Bible teaches that God loves us and has plans for us even after we die. Tell me though, what portions of the Bible lead you to the conclusions you mentioned? If I understand you correctly, you are looking for God's Kingdom to be established here, on earth, at some future date.

VISITOR:

That's right. Dan. 2:44 predicts that God will set up a Kingdom that will last forever. Matthew tells us to pray for it to come;

Dan. 2:44 (KJV)

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

Matt 6:9 & 6:10 (KJV; my underlining)

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Furthermore, you can look at numerous scriptures so see that His Kingdom will be set up right here on earth. Look at how the Psalms and Matthew express it;

Psalms 37:9 (KJV)

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.

Psalms 37:11 (KJV)

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Matt. 5:5 (KJV)

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

ME:

Your argument addresses two separate issues. One is the time of arrival of the Kingdom. The other is the question of its location. We can divide our study into two parts. Doing so will ensure that all the various points we make, won't get all mixed up. Let's start with the question of when the Kingdom is to arrive.

The Kingdom- WHEN?

For a brief moment, skip past the first seven words of Dan 2:44 (KJV). The rest leaves no doubt that God will set up a Kingdom that will endure forever. We even know it will be set up at a time beyond Daniel's prophecy because Daniel says He "shall" set it up. But your group teaches that He will set it up at a time in *our* future. Scripturally, I have much difficulty with your conclusion.

The first seven words of this verse (KJV) place a serious constraint on the time at which the prophecy was to be fulfilled. To see why these seven words are so important to our discussion, we need to first understand all the information given in Daniel, Chapter 2. Here's a brief review of the events of that chapter;

1. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. Ultimately, it fell upon Daniel to describe the dream and provide its interpretation.
2. Daniel describes the dream (Dan. 2:31 - 2:35).
3. Daniel interprets the dream (Dan. 2:36 - 2:45).

As Daniel interprets the dream, he enumerates *four* (not five) kingdoms. In Verse 2:44. Daniel expresses that within the span of these four kingdoms, God's Kingdom would be established. But historically the sequential progression of the empires (kingdoms) from Nebuchadnezzar's time, are accurately known;

1. The Babylonian Empire (Nebuchadnezzar)
2. The Medo-Persian Empire
3. The Grecian Empire
4. The Roman Empire.

We must accept the first seven words of Dan 2:44 on an equal basis with the rest of the verse. Doing so, it's prophesied that God's everlasting Kingdom would be established at some time within the era of these four empires. At the *latest* then, His Kingdom would be established *before* the end of the Roman Empire.

VISITOR:

That dream is full of symbols that have to be interpreted. go through the details of the dream, and analyze the symbols. You'll see that they reveal *five*, not four kingdoms. I know this, because my teachers have gone through the dream, and interpreted the symbols along with me. This fifth kingdom is the one we are currently waiting to present itself.

ME:

You are giving me an interesting, but easy choice to make. I could choose to believe your interpretation of the symbols in the dream. Then again, I could accept Daniel's interpretation of the dream..... namely, that only four kingdoms were to occur before God established his everlasting Kingdom.

My strong preference is to accept Daniel's interpretation of the dream. After all, even your own group firmly acknowledges Daniel as a prophet... a spokesman of God. That leaves me with no doubt then, that the very latest His Kingdom would be set up, would be before the end of the Roman Empire.

VISITOR:

Many people think our current time is an extension of the Roman Empire. Therefore it's important for us, NOW to pray for the Kingdom to come.

ME:

If I understand you correctly, you are now accepting that only four kingdoms were to occur before the arrival of God's Kingdom. But you think the fourth one (the Roman Empire) is extended in time, all the way to the current day.

By any historically correct documentation, the Roman Empire is well-known to have collapsed centuries ago (for example, see Reference-23). There have been any number of empires that have come and gone since the Roman Empire. The arrays of nations and their unions arising and falling, all

the way to the present, can in no way be considered an extension of the Roman Empire.

It's no coincidence that Jesus' earthly ministry took place during the occupation of the Roman Empire. Jesus' presence on earth was predicted by Isaiah and by Micah, among others, many hundreds of years before he came to earth as a child;

Isa. 9:5-7 (NIV)

For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the Government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign over David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Isa. 53:2-7 (NIV)

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrow, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth....

Micah 5:2 (NIV)

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small

among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times.

Both the New Testament scriptures and the historical record show that Jesus' earthly ministry occurred during the time of the Roman Empire. Here's just one example affirming the record;

John 11:47-48 (NIV)

Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting of The Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked, "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Jesus taught his followers that God's Kingdom was very imminent;

Mark 1:15 (NIV)

"The time has come," he said, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Luke 9:27 (NIV)

I tell you the truth, some who are standing here, will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.

In Matt. 6:10 then, Jesus wasn't telling *us* to pray for the imminent arrival of the Kingdom, He was telling *them*! And unless those 'standing here' (in Luke 9:27) were to live for a couple thousand years, there's no reason for us to be waiting now, for the Kingdom to arrive.

Did you notice in Isa. 9:7 the phrase, '... upholding it [the Kingdom]... from that time on and forever.'? Not only, then, would Jesus establish the Kingdom during the time of the Roman Empire, but He will uphold it forever,

from the moment it's set up. So, Luke 9:27 is entirely consistent with the establishment of the Kingdom very near in time to Jesus' earthly ministry.

In Mark, Jesus not only describes the proximate nature of the Kingdom, but that it also was to come with power;

Mk. 9:1 (NIV)

And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

So, what event happened in the New Testament, that transpired in accordance with these verses? After the crucifixion & resurrection & ascension of Christ, only one thing fulfills the predictions in these verses... the beginning of Christ's church. It began in Acts Chapter-2, and it did indeed, come with power;

Acts 2:2-4 (NIV)

..... Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit enabled them.....

Because of what the crowd saw and heard, many believed Peter's message and were repentant and were baptized (Acts 2:37-38). The number of Christians in the body of Christ increased;

Acts 2:41 (NIV)

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

The beginning of God's Kingdom then, is directly correlated with the beginning of the church, during the Roman occupation. Paul stated in his first letter to the Corinthians that the church (as spoken of the Kingdom)

would last forever. He also indicated continuity of the church (i.e., the Kingdom) when it is translated to heaven;

I Cor. 15:24 (NIV)

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

In order for the Kingdom to be handed over to God at the end, it must have existed *prior to* the end.

Further evidence that the church is God's Kingdom is given in Chapter-4. There it's made amply clear that The church is Christ's body and He is the Head of that body... He is going to save that body.

Paul wrote his New Testament letters approximately 2000 years ago. But he made it clear even then, that his fellow Christians had already been made a part of God's Kingdom. So, as far back as two millennia ago, Christians were not waiting for the Kingdom to come... they knew it already had come... as the church. Notice the words Paul uses in his letter to the Christians at Colosse;

Col. 1:2 (NIV; my underlining)

To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse:

Col. 1:13 (NIV; my underlining)

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul's use of the *past tense*, only decades after Christ's resurrection is sound proof that the kingdom had already arrived, long ago.

But it's not only Paul who gives such positive indication about the church. John, the author of the Revelation, also realized that the Kingdom had

already arrived and that the members of the church are the members of the Kingdom. John also used the *past tense*, and leaves no doubt as to the status of the Kingdom at the time he wrote about it;

Rev. 1:4 (NIV; my underlining)

John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Rev. 1:6 (NIV; my underlining)

..... and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father- to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

By the way, this last verse is made complicated in the KJV. There, the original language is translated in this way;

Rev. 1:6 (KJV)

... and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father...

Using only the KJV, we'd be more than a bit fuzzy about the status of the Kingdom. Let's use the Interlinear to verify that we don't have 'dueling' versions of the same verse. The Interlinear's transliteration verifies the accuracy of the NIV in its translation of the verse;

Rev. 1:6 (Interlinear; my underlining)

..... and made us a kingdom, priests to the God and Father of him, to him is glory and the might unto the ages of the ages: Amen.

So, to conclude: the point you made that we are awaiting establishment of the Kingdom is interesting. However, it does not stand up under the close

scrutiny of the scriptures. John especially, proves the connection of the church and the Kingdom, and declares that it came two millennia ago.

The Kingdom - WHERE?

VISITOR:

What then, about all the scriptures I mentioned earlier. Remember the ones referring to the idea that we'll have eternal life right here, on the EARTH?

ME:

Your verses are all worded quite similarly. So what we learn from investigating one, will most likely apply to the others. Let's take as our example, Psalms 37:22.

Psalms 37:22 (KJV)

*For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth;
and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off.*

The first thing I noticed is that all the translations do not even use 'earth' in those verses. Here's the NIV's version;

Psalms 37:22 (NIV; my underlining)

*Those the Lord blesses will inherit the land. But those
he curses will be cut off.*

The question is, just what do the scriptures mean by 'inherit the land'? Gesenius' lexicon of the Old Testament (Reference-13; #3423 & #776) sheds much light on this question. According to Gesenius, 'inherit the land' refers to the aspirations of the ancient Jewish people to live freely, happily, and untroubled in their own land. It has nothing to do with the saved ones living forever on a perfect earth in a future time. Gesenius, in the sections cited, points out;

"..... to possess the (holy) land, spoken of a quiet occupancy in that land, which had been promised of old to the Israelites, and was regarded as the highest happiness of life."

"..... not unfrequently used of Palestine."

We've already considered the many scriptures that reveal our permanent home in heaven. This revelation (that inheriting the earth really means inheriting the land the Jews so longed to possess) is consistent with our earlier discussion.