

Did Jesus Establish His Kingdom?

(Adapted from an appendix for my self-study course on 1 & 2 Thessalonians)
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Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are from the NIV and all bolding is added. LORD (in all-capital letters) stands for the Old Testament name for the true God, Yahweh. Hebrew and Greek titles have been capitalized.

“This man...claims to be Christ [*Cristos*], a King” (Luke 23:2). This claim, though spoken by Jesus’ enemies who didn’t believe it, is true. He is indeed the *Christ*. The same Greek title is common in the Greek version of the Old Testament. It belonged to every king of Judah (e.g., in 1 Samuel 12:3 to Saul; in 16:6 to David). Like *Mashiac*, its Hebrew equivalent (and *Messiah* from Aramaic), *Cristos* literally means “Anointed.” This refers to God’s gift of the Holy Spirit upon the king. Above all, this title was used of the future great Son of David. For example, in Psalm 2 it says that the earthly rulers rebel “against the LORD and against his Anointed One” (v. 2). “Anointed One” is *Mashiac* in Hebrew, translated *Cristos* (Christ) in Greek. In succeeding verses the LORD identifies His Anointed as “my King” (v. 6), begotten as the LORD’s “Son” (v. 7) to inherit “the nations...the ends of the earth” (v. 8).

All Christians believe that Jesus is that promised King—and often pray, “Your kingdom come.” Not all Christians agree, however, as to whether He has established His kingdom and begun to rule. Many assume that He has. That assumption, however, is flawed—as this paper will show—and leads to misunderstanding many Scriptures.

The Kingdom Promised

Old Testament prophecies often describe a future glorious kingdom of God on earth. For examples, see Psalm 2; Isaiah 11; Isaiah 35; Isaiah 60; and Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45¹. The kingdom they promise has elements material, political, and spiritual. It will involve God’s rule through His Messiah (Isa. 9:6-7) over a purified Israel (Zech. 12:10; 13:1), a liberated creation (Isa. 35), nations living in peace and righteousness, and even people raised from death (Isa. 25:6-9). That kingdom is identified as a restoration and perfection of God’s former kingdom over the nation of Israel; in fact, Micah 4:8 calls it “the former dominion.”² Observe some of the typical promises bolded in the following quotation from Micah 4 (NASB).³ And notice the comments in brackets.

¹ Daniel 2:44-45 pictures the kingdom as a stone from heaven that displaces all earthly kingdoms. Based on this picture, the Jews often called the coming earthly kingdom “the kingdom of heaven.” In the Bible this term is used often—and only—in Matthew.

² The whole Old Testament tells about the past history and the future of God’s “former dominion.” This is not His universal kingdom, which has no “history.” Instead it was, and will be, as theologians say, a “mediatorial kingdom,” because in it a mediator ruled/will rule on God’s behalf. That kingdom began when God brought Israel out of Egypt and made a covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:4-6; 25:22; Psalm 114:1-2). The tabernacle/temple became His earthly house; the golden ark His throne. That kingdom was suspended when God abandoned the temple—which was destroyed—and Judah went into captivity (Ezek. 10:4, 18-19). God raised up many prophets to predict its demise. It will be reinstated, also according to many prophecies, such as, Micah 4:1-8.

³ God emphasized this promise by repeating it; Micah 4:1-3 is virtually identical to Isaiah 2:2-4. Notice the time, place, and subjects for the promised kingdom (4:1-2, 7b-8), the Ruler and His activities (vv. 2, 3, 7), the effects on the nations (vv. 2-4), and the restored people of Israel (v. 8).

1 And it will come about **in the last days**
 That the mountain of the house of the LORD
 Will be established as the chief of **the**
mountains. [on earth]
 It will be raised above the hills,
 And **the peoples** will stream to it.
 2 And **many nations** will come and say,
 “Come and let us go up to the mountain of
 the LORD
 And to the house of **the God of Jacob,**
 That He may teach us about His ways
 And **that we may walk in His paths.**”
 For **from Zion** will go forth the law,
 Even the word of the LORD **from**
Jerusalem. [the world capital]
 3 And **He will judge** between many peoples
 [through His Messiah]
 And render decisions for mighty, distant
 nations.

Then they will hammer their swords into
 plowshares
 And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
 And never again will they train for war.
 4 And each of them will sit under **his vine**
 And under his **fig tree,** [material security and
 prosperity]
 With no one to make them afraid,
 For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

 7b And **the LORD will reign** over them in
 Mount Zion
 From now on and forever.
 8 “And as for you, tower of the flock,
 Hill of **the daughter of Zion** [which implies
 that the nation of Israel will be repentant],
 To you it will come—
 Even the **former dominion** will come,
 The **kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.**

Most if not all Bible interpreters agree that this kingdom as promised was the great hope of the Jews. Jews called it “the kingdom,” “the kingdom of God,” and “the kingdom of heaven.” The latter term, used often in Matthew, not only avoided saying God’s name but referred to the kingdom’s heavenly origin (see Daniel 2:44-45). The Jewish hope shines brightly in the lengthy introduction to the Gospel of Luke, that is, chapters 1 and 2. For example, “Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied” (Luke 1:67) about that kingdom and its Ruler: “The Lord, the God of Israel...has come” (1:68), he said, “and...raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” (1:69). What kind of salvation? “Salvation from our [Israel’s] enemies...to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness” (1:71-75).

The Promised Kingdom Near

With such a hope, it is no wonder that the Jews became excited when first John then Jesus began proclaiming,

“The kingdom of heaven **has drawn near.**”

(Matthew 3:2; 4:17; literal translation, showing the meaning of the Greek verb)

Not only did Jesus say that the kingdom was near. He also proved it by doing miracles that could bring a kingdom both spiritual and material as predicted: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Matt. 11:5; cf. Isa. 35:5-6). Matthew 8-9 give a wide sampling of His many kinds of authority, even over nature and demons. The people that were there, according to Hebrews 6:5, “tasted...the powers of the coming age.” Note that (1) Jesus’ miracles (the same word as “powers”) belong to the “coming age.” (2) That age was still future when Hebrews was written (Heb. 2:5) and when the apostle Paul wrote Ephesians, where he spoke of

both “the present age” and “the one to come” (Eph. 1:21). (3) That will be the age of the kingdom. By doing its miracles, Jesus showed that He will be its King.

The expected Messiah was often called “the Coming One.” Yet John the Baptist, like earlier prophets, did not know that Messiah would come twice. John rightfully predicted that the coming King would punish the wicked. Yet, when wicked Herod kept John in prison, Jesus did nothing about it. So John began to doubt. From prison he sent to ask Jesus if He indeed was “the Coming One.” Jesus’ answer was to do more “miracles of the age to come” and tell John to consider them. This amounted to a clear yes (Matt. 11:2-5, NASB).

Thus, Jesus showed all the power of the promised kingdom. He also imparted that power to His disciples (Matt. 10:1). He sent them as His representatives, with the same miraculous evidence, to “the lost sheep of Israel.” They also carried the same message: “The kingdom of heaven **has drawn near**” (Matt. 10:7, literal). Even on His final trip to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51)—where He would die and rise again—this message was still valid. He repeatedly told the “seventy-two” messengers to preach it “to every town and place where he was about to go” (Luke 10:1, 9, 11). It was the underlying message of His entire ministry.

The Greek verb used in this message (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Luke 10:9, 11) is *engiken*, a “perfect tense” form from *engidzo*, *draw near*. Some have argued that this Greek verb proves that the kingdom *arrived* and *began*. That argument is mistaken. The verb never means “arrive,” which is expressed by other verbs, such as, *heko* (John 4:47; 8:42; Matt. 24:50; Luke 15:27), *enistemi* (2 Thess. 2:2), and *erkomai* (John 4:25, 35).. Like its cognate adverb *near* (*engus*, Matt. 24:32), *engidzo* always refers to approach, not to arrival. The approach might be close, but arrival itself must be determined from other factors. Consider two other texts that use the same verb form (*engiken*): James 5:8 and 1 Peter 4:7. James says that “the Lord’s coming **is near**”; Peter says that “the end of all things **is near**.” In neither case have these things arrived yet. (For other examples, see Matt. 21:1; Rom. 13:12.)

Notice three facts and inferences about this constant message:

- Fact 1: John and Jesus **did not define** what kingdom was near.
Inference: They expected the Jews to understand and must have meant the kingdom the Jews knew about from the prophecies.
- Fact 2: This kingdom had “**drawn near**.”
Inference: It was not near nor present in the period before John and Jesus began. Therefore, it was neither God’s universal kingdom⁴ nor His rule in men’s hearts—which are always present—but the promised kingdom.
- Fact 3: This kingdom **remained near at least until Jesus’ passion** (Luke 9:51; 10:1-11).
Inference: As long as it was preached as “drawn near,” this kingdom had not yet begun.

In addition to this third inference, there is positive evidence that the kingdom did not begin during Jesus’ ministry. For example, the Lord specifically designed a parable to show that it

⁴ From “his throne in heaven...his kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19). As stated before, that universal kingdom has no history; it cannot draw near. It is usually easy to distinguish from His mediatorial kingdom, which began when Israel prepared Him a throne on earth (Exod. 25:21-22).

would not start until His return (Luke 19:11-27; see especially vv. 11, 15, 27). After this parable Luke's Gospel referred four more times by name to the "kingdom of God": 21:31; 22:16; 22:18; and 23:51. In each of these references the kingdom was clearly future.

Two Views that the Kingdom Began

Yet, during His ministry the Lord occasionally spoke of the kingdom as though it were not just near but present. Twice in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) He said, "Theirs **is** the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3, 10). Later He said, "The kingdom of God **has come upon** you" (Matt. 12:28). Do such statements mean that, in spite of the evidence already cited, the promised kingdom had actually begun? If so, then it proved to be quite unlike the one described by the prophets—producing a discrepancy between prophecy and fulfillment. Yet, many today say that it did begin. They resolve the discrepancy in one of two different ways: (1) One view rejects the evident meaning of the prophecies and "spiritualizes" the kingdom. That view considers the kingdom prophecies already fulfilled. (2) Another view accepts the prophecies at face value, expecting them to be fulfilled later, but believes that the kingdom has also come in another form.

The first view just mentioned misdefines the kingdom because it takes only a few Scriptures into account. It overlooks, as implied in the title of Alva McClain's superb book, "the greatness of the kingdom"—its many aspects. And it cannot explain why the Lord Jesus confirmed the evident meaning of the prophecies. For example, (1) His many "miracles of the coming age" (Heb. 6:5, literal translation) befitted a kingdom both spiritual and material. Also, (2) He specifically promised the same kind of kingdom. He said He will return to earth in glory and sit on "His glorious throne" (Matt. 19:28; 25:31) in order to rule over "all the nations" (Matt. 25:32). At that time will occur "the renewal of all things" (Matt. 19:28; cf. Acts 3:21). Christ's followers will participate in His future rule (Matt. 19:28-29; 25:34), which will last forever (Matt. 25:46; Luke 1:32-33).

Secrets of the Kingdom

Those who hold the second view mentioned above, believe that the Old Testament prophecies and Jesus' promises meant what they said. But they think they discover in the Gospels an additional, present form of the kingdom. They find it revealed in the parables beginning in Matthew 13 and containing "secrets of the kingdom" (13:11). They believe that it is described after the common introduction "the kingdom...is like" (Matt. 13:24, 33, etc.). Some call it the "mystery form" of the kingdom, based on the King James Version's "mysteries of the kingdom."

There is a better explanation of these secrets of the kingdom. They do not reveal a new form of the promised kingdom but a new and unexpected age in preparation for it. This new age is a gap between the King's (Messiah's) sufferings and His glories (1 Peter 1:10-12). The kingdom, though certain, will not be established until the King comes back in glory. Considering the Jewish background of Jesus' disciples, they most likely would have understood the parables in this way. And Matthew 13:51-52 makes it clear that they did understand them.

If the parables do not describe a present kingdom, how should we understand the phrase "The kingdom...is like"? A common Jewish introduction for a parable, it does not mean that the next item mentioned is the kingdom. Consider, for example, the first things mentioned in some of

those parables. The kingdom is clearly not “a man who sowed good seed” (Matt. 13:24), nor “yeast” (Matt. 13:33), nor “a landowner” (20:1). Instead, that introduction means that the whole parable tells something about the kingdom, although the kingdom itself may be only one part of the parable. Rightly or wrongly, each interpreter finds the kingdom pictured in the part that fits his own definition.

Apply that rule to the Parable of the Tares (Weeds). In it some identify the kingdom with the field of mixed wheat and tares, which field the Lord calls “the world” (Matt. 13:38). But others find it in the consummation that begins with the judgment at the end of the age (vv. 40-41). Consider the Parable of the Mustard. Some identify the kingdom with the tiny seed when first sowed (Matt. 13:31); others, after it becomes a tree (v. 32). Since the Lord’s disciples defined the kingdom like other Jews, they must have seen it in the grand consummation of each parable.

To summarize, the Lord throughout His ministry announced that the kingdom had drawn near. He also confirmed the Old Testament descriptions of it and promised that it would begin when He returns in glory. His “secrets of the kingdom” revealed an unexpected age in preparation for it, involving two comings of Messiah.

Reasons the Lord Sometimes Spoke of the Kingdom as Present

Occasionally, however, He did speak of the kingdom in the present tense. Why did He do that if it was still future? For two main reasons:

- First, for emphasis. In a deliberate change of viewpoint, prophets often spoke of future well-known events or conditions as though they were present. For example, Isaiah 24:1-13 described the future Tribulation mostly in Hebrew present (“participle”) and past (“perfect”) tenses. Similarly, in Luke 20:35-36 the Lord spoke in the present tense of the future resurrection: “**marry...are given in marriage...can no longer die...are...are....**” The verbs are all present in Greek but refer to the future. Likewise, in Romans 2:2 the Apostle Paul wrote of the future judgment in the present tense (“God’s judgment...**is** based on truth”).

Normally, the context makes it clear that this change in tense is only a change in viewpoint. In the Old Testament example given, Isaiah 24:3, 13 show that the whole passage is future by using the Hebrew “imperfect” tense. Consider the Beatitudes, where the Lord twice (Matt. 5:3, 10) spoke of the kingdom in the present tense. In the intervening verses (5:4-9) He six times promised kingdom blessings in the future tense. And He definitely spoke of the kingdom as future in other parts of the Sermon on the Mount (5:19-20; 6:10; 7:21-23).

- Second, He spoke of the future kingdom as present in a special sense. It was present in the person of the King, the Anointed One. This explains Matthew 12:28 (“The kingdom of God has come upon you”) and Luke 17:21 (“the kingdom of God is in your midst,” NASB⁵).⁶

⁵ Convinced that the kingdom is spiritual, some (such as, NIV) translate “*within* you.” That is a possible meaning for the preposition, but not likely. Would Jesus say that the kingdom was “within” the enemy “Pharisees” who asked when it was coming? Also, would He contradict His constant message (“the kingdom has drawn near”) that prompted their question?

⁶ This identification of the kingdom with Messiah also explains how it could “suffer violence” (Matt. 11:12, NASB). Jesus in effect opened the doors to the kingdom, but the Jewish leaders refused to enter or let others enter

Though anointed at His baptism—and again at His resurrection—Jesus did not begin to reign. He is definitely the King, as the early church preached (Acts 17:3, 7). But like His forefather David, He became King long before the time came to sit on David’s throne (Acts 2:30).

After His resurrection, Jesus was exalted not to His own throne but to His Father’s; the two thrones are distinguished in Revelation 3:21. There He waits as the Father tells Him: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Heb. 1:13 and Acts 2:34-35, quoting Psalm 110:1). In His absence from earth, the kingdom is no longer present. However, there are people being enrolled for it, belonging to it before it comes (Col. 1:13).

The Kingdom the Hope of the Church

Even though Jesus gave abundant evidence that He was the Messiah, His people Israel rejected Him. The kingdom, though still near at that time, did not begin. Instead, Jesus promised to come again and bring it. He also promised to build His own kingdom assembly, the *ekklesia*, which we call the church. From its inception the church held undiminished the hope of the future kingdom.

1. The first clear biblical prediction of the church—Matthew 16:13-19—relates it to the kingdom. That occasion was when Simon, as spokesman for the apostles, made the great confession about Jesus. His confession was a revelation from the Father. The Son, in turn, made a revelation that included His future church (*ekklesia*).

- The revelation from the Father (vv. 16-17) was the confession about Jesus:

You are the Christ (Messiah).

As you have seen, *Christ* (Greek *Cristos*) means **the promised King of the promised kingdom**, the Messiah (Matt. 2:2, 4; Luke 23:2).

As seen in all three accounts of Simon’s confession, the key term is “Christ.” Although Matthew adds “Son of God,” Luke and Mark do not. Luke 9:20 has “the Christ [anointed] of God”; Mark 8:29 has “the Christ.” Evidently, “Son of God” in Matthew is not basically different from “Christ” but an extension emphasizing His heirship, as in Solomon’s case (1 Chron. 17:11-14).

- The revelation from the Son (vv. 18-19) began by His blessing the confessor:

You are Peter (man of rock).

He then announced that He would build His *ekklesia* (church) on this rock (v. 18). And He would give to Peter (apparently as the representative of all confessors) the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” and great authority on earth (v. 19).

Ekklesia was not a new concept in Matthew 16. It was the usual Greek term for the Hebrew *qahal*, the “assembly” or “congregation” of God’s people Israel in the

(Matt. 23:13). They even killed the Son, Heir to God’s vineyard. So the kingdom (program) was taken away from them (Matt. 21:43) for the present time.

- “former dominion.”⁷ A few Old Testament verses also referred to an *ekklesia* in the future. For example, Psalm 22:22 looked forward to Messiah’s future “congregation,” as proved by Hebrews 2:12. (See also Psalm 35:18; 40:9.) The apostles hearing Jesus refer to His *ekklesia* probably thought of that same future congregation. He would prepare His kingdom people. Thus, the *ekklesia* being formed is already His “kingdom” in one sense before the kingdom begins (Rev. 1:6; Col. 1:13).
2. The early church looked for Jesus’ “appearing and His kingdom.” (2 Tim. 4:1; cf. Titus 2:13)
 3. Their goal was to enter that kingdom and share that glory.
 - “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22)
 - “Live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” (1 Thess. 2:12)
 - “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us....The creation itself will be liberated....We wait eagerly for...the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom. 8:18-25; a liberated creation clearly implies an earthly kingdom.)
 - “The Lord will rescue me...and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.” (2 Tim. 4:18; “heavenly” referring to its character, not its location.)
 4. In it they will receive their inheritance.
 - “Come...take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” (Matt. 25:34)
 - “The wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. 6:9-10; see also Eph. 5:5.)
 - “Has not God chosen those who are poor...to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised...?” (James 2:5)
 - “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests...and they will reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:10)
 - At the seventh trumpet in his vision, John heard loud voices anticipating the conclusion: “You have... begun to reign....The time has come...for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints.” (Rev. 11:15-18)

Various passages, such as Acts 20:32; Ephesians 1:14, 18; and 1 Peter 5:1, 4, refer to this inheritance in the future kingdom without using the word *kingdom*. Sometimes they relate it to the Lord’s “coming” or “glory.” For example, in 1 Peter 1 notice our “living hope” (v. 3), “inheritance...kept in heaven” (v. 4), and “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (v. 5). These are all equated to “praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (v. 7) and “the grace that is to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (v. 13).
 5. The heavenly home prepared for them (John 14:1-3) will descend to a marvelous new earth (Rev. 21:1-3).
 6. The kingdom was their message.

⁷ In its first uses (Deut. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16, etc.) *ekklesia* refers to Israel assembled by Moses (Exod. 19:17) before God at Mt. Sinai. Stephen refers to the same assembly by the same term (Acts 7:38). In other passages (Deut. 23:1-3; 31:30; 2 Chron. 7:8; 20:5, 14; etc.) it refers to the same nation assembled as God’s kingdom people on other occasions.

“He preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.” (Acts 8:12; cf. 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31)

7. The coming of the kingdom was the object of their prayers.

“This, then, is how you should pray:...your kingdom come...” (Matt. 6:9-10)

8. In view of the coming kingdom, no suffering was too great.

“All the persecutions and trials you are enduring...the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.” (2 Thess. 1:4-5)

Consider the hope of the early church as pictured by a second century “Church Father”:

But I and whatsoever Christians are orthodox in all things do know that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, and a thousand years in the city of Jerusalem, built, adorned and enlarged, according as Ezekiel, Isaiah, and other prophets have promised. For Isaiah saith of this thousand years...“Behold I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind”...Whereof also our Lord spake when He said, that therein they shall neither marry, nor be given in marriage, but shall be equal with the angels, being made the sons of the resurrection of God. (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, section 2)

Verses Some Use to Prove a Present Kingdom

The early church believed that the kingdom will be all God said it will be. The church did not identify itself—except in a special way—or anything else as the kingdom. As you have seen, it could harmonize the few “problem” verses (such as, “the secrets”) with the many clear ones. Consider how it could understand other Scriptures that some now apply to a present kingdom:

- Eight times in Acts “kingdom” refers to God’s kingdom (1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Most of these passages summarize the early message. In two of them (1:6 and 14:22) the kingdom had to be future. What about the rest? Remember that Luke wrote this book. His every use of “kingdom of God” in the last chapters of his Gospel (Luke 19:11; 21:31; 22:16; 22:18; 23:51) clearly referred to it as future. Should it not logically mean the same thing in his second book?
- In Romans 14:17 “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy...” There are two issues in interpreting this statement about “the kingdom of God.” (1) Can the present tense refer to the future kingdom? We have already seen that it can. (2) Does its apparent denial of material aspects (“the kingdom...is not eating and drinking”) define a strictly spiritual kingdom? No, because that absolute statement can and should be interpreted as relative (meaning, “the kingdom...is not primarily”).

This use of “absolute for relative” is a common figure of speech in the Bible. For example, Exodus 16:2 says that “the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.” Therefore, when Moses responded, “You **are not grumbling against us**, but against the Lord” (v. 8), his absolute statement (bolded) clearly had a relative meaning (“are not primarily grumbling against us”). See other examples in Deuteronomy 5:2-3; Philippians 2:4; and 1 John 3:18.

In other words, Romans 14:17 can refer to the future kingdom without negating verses like Matthew 8:11 (“the feast...in the kingdom”; see also Luke 22:16, 18, 30) or Isaiah 25:6 (“the

LORD Almighty will prepare a feast”). In fact, in Romans 8 (see above) Paul had already described a kingdom including material elements, and thus requiring bodily resurrection. In that kingdom there will be “eating and drinking” but also—and far more important—righteousness, peace, and joy.

- In 1 Corinthians 4:20 the kingdom “is not a matter of talk but of power.” In all the other uses of “kingdom” in 1 Corinthians (6:9, 10; 15:24, 50), it was clearly the future one. There is no need to change that here. Even in this same chapter (4:8) Paul had already referred to it as future—note the touch of sarcasm: “You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings, so that we might be kings with you!” In other words, they had acted as though the kingdom had begun; so in verse 20 he challenged them to prove by their power that it really had begun.
- In Colossians 1:13 the Father “has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” This sounds like a present kingdom. But consider Paul’s point of view. In the previous verse he has just referred to our inheritance in the future kingdom: God “has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light” (1:12). Though still living in the world of darkness (where we “struggle against the powers of this dark world,” Eph. 6:12), we do not belong to it. We now belong to “the kingdom of light.” We are “sons of the light and sons of the day...we belong to the day,” though the day has not arrived (1 Thess. 5:5-9). In other words, our future is assured. When 1 Corinthians 3:21-22 says, “All things are yours,” it even includes “the future” in the list of things that are ours.

Therefore, our transfer to the kingdom is

de jure [judicial] rather than *de facto* [in fact]....Our [transfer] into the Kingdom of Christ, therefore, must be similar to that act of God when He “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 6:12). Although we are not yet *de facto* seated in the heavenlies, the thing is so certain that God can speak of it as already done. In the same sense, we have been (aorist tense) transferred *judicially* into the Kingdom of our Lord even before its establishment. (McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 435)

Paul speaks the same way later in Colossians: “Your life is now hidden with Christ in God....When Christ...appears, you also will appear with him in glory” (3:1-3). Are we in heaven **in fact**? No. Are we in the kingdom **in fact**? No. But in God’s plan, both are certain.

- In Hebrews 1:8, speaking of the Son, the King James Version supplies present-tense verbs: “Thy throne, O God, **is** for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness **is** the sceptre of thy kingdom.” But so clearly is this future that NIV changes the supplied verbs to “will last” and “will be.” In fact, nearly everything in Hebrews 1:5-14, as well as the “great salvation” of 2:3, refers to that future kingdom. So the author informs us in 2:5: “the world to come, about which we are speaking.”
- Hebrews 12:28 says, “we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.” The time for us to receive it can be ascertained in passages such as Matthew 25:34 (“Take your inheritance, the

kingdom”) and 1 Peter 1:3-9 (“inheritance...glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed”). In Hebrews 12 the kingdom we will receive is what will survive a future world-wide shaking (vv. 26-27).

- In Revelation 1:6 Christ “has made us to be a kingdom and priests.” Revelation 5:10 says the same thing, then adds, “and they will reign on the earth.” In other words, we are designed as His future kingdom—and are already subject to Him—but are not reigning yet. Similarly, Revelation 1:5 says that Jesus is “the ruler of the kings of the earth”—though He is not ruling them yet.
- In Revelation 1:9 John is our “companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance.” The suffering is present; the kingdom is future; and the endurance takes us from one to the other.
- Revelation 11:15 says that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” As elsewhere in Revelation, this announces as a fact what is about to happen (see 1:7; 12:10; 14:8, 11; 16:17; 19:6-8; 21:3). In this case, it announces the grand outcome of the seventh trumpet.
- In Revelation 12:10 “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ.” This is another announcement like 11:15.

Conclusion

“We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it” (2 Peter 1:19). That prophetic word predicts a glorious kingdom on earth, which our Lord promised to establish when He returns. For many years the early church looked for such a kingdom. When did it lose that confidence? Especially in the fourth century when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire. Nowadays many Christians believe that the promised kingdom began at Jesus’ first coming. This belief makes them misunderstand many Scriptures and tend to forget the goal. But our defective faith or understanding does not change God’s glorious plan. He shall surely bring it to pass. Jesus shall rule.