

The Four Gospels
The Kingdom Offered & Postponed

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The Promised Kingdom: Sample Descriptions in Isaiah

Isaiah 2:2-4

² In the last days
the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.
³ Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
⁴ He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

Isaiah 11:4-6, 12

⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them. ...
¹² He will raise a banner for the nations
and gather the exiles of Israel;
he will assemble the scattered people of Judah
from the four quarters of the earth.

Isaiah 35:1, 5-6

¹ The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. ...
⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.

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Synopsis

*They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9)*

This verse from Isaiah is one of God's many descriptions of the kingdom He has promised. Surely all right-minded people want a world like that instead of the one we have. And that is God's kingdom that the New Testament frequently mentions. Matthew alone, the first book, names it over fifty times! The next two Gospels have the same point of view as Matthew. They all present Jesus as the Christ, the Ruler of that kingdom. And they all unfold the same developments in the kingdom program. What they say is basic to the rest of the New Testament.

God promised to restore the Old Testament kingdom over Israel. The Bible speaks about two aspects of God's kingdom. The first is His eternal rule over everything. That never changes. But the second is His rule through men. That does change. That is what the Bible is all about—the origin and history of God's kingdom on earth. God created heaven and earth as a stage for man to rule as His representative. He chose Abraham and miraculously multiplied him into the nation called Israel. He brought Israel out of Egypt to His mountain, where they became His kingdom. He gave us the rest of the Old Testament as the story of that rule. The kingdom was finally suspended, just as God's prophets had predicted, because Israel was so unfaithful. But they also predicted its future restoration under the rule of a descendant of King David.

A key to the kingdom is God's nation Israel. He will never rescind having chosen them: "His gifts and His call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ..." (Rom. 9:4-5). They were the representatives of all mankind before God, the most prepared. They were His kingdom before—and to them He offered it again.

To understand the Gospels, we must pay attention to their continuity with the Old Testament. Matthew's first verse has five links to that previous story! The kingdom that drew near was God's long-suspended kingdom over Israel. No one had to define it because they all knew how the prophets had described it. Israel would be restored, liberated, and made the head of the nations. The ruler would be King David's descendant sitting on David's throne. The capital would be Jerusalem. The nations would live in justice and peace. Even deserts would blossom and the curse be forgotten. Everybody agrees that this was how Israel understood the re-offered kingdom. Even the angelic announcements and Spirit-filled speeches of Luke chapters 1 and-2 reflected their hopes. So did John the Baptist. He confidently predicted that the "Coming One" would destroy wicked people and bring full salvation.

Israel refused God's offer. What a surprise the Gospels chronicle. God's people Israel did not like His offer! It was not because they lacked evidence. Jesus showed all the power and wisdom needed to establish the kingdom as predicted, "to make all things new." In Him the kingdom touched earth; it was "in their midst." But Israel was deeply offended when John and Jesus

preached that they must repent and be transformed. They were not good enough; they “must be born again.” But they refused to repent. So most of them—leaders and led alike—were concluding that Jesus could not be the promised King. There were “large crowds” following Him, but He knew they would be fickle.

Jesus now revealed “secrets” about the offered kingdom. These “secrets” were developments planned by God but not previously made known to men. He revealed them by using a new method of teaching with parables, not just illustrating with them. By explaining the parables only to His disciples, Jesus revealed to them what He kept hidden from most of Israel. His first parable started where His ministry started. He was the farmer/sower who was spreading like seed the good news that the kingdom was near. His disciples, who truly received His Word, were like “good soil” that eventually “produces a crop.”

For some of the parables He used a common rabbinic introduction. For example, “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed....” This meant that the whole parable was about Jesus’ kingdom that would come from heaven. (It did not mean, of course, that it was like “a man.”) In Jesus’ own explanation of this parable, the kingdom would be established in “the harvest...at the end of the age.” Not at the beginning or middle of the parable, but at the end. This is the only interpretation we are given of a “kingdom-is-like” parable. Since the kingdom is not its beginning but its grand conclusion, we should assume the same position in all such parables.

The kingdom that drew near was “postponed.” From man’s perspective that was the main “secret.” The kingdom being announced *would not begin immediately* but after an additional period of preparation. After that, the Son of Man would come to establish it, glorious as predicted. This meant that the King would come not once but twice. But why the delay? Jesus later clearly revealed some reasons. Above all, He would suffer and die, then go to heaven until His time to rule. While waiting to rule, He is building His kingdom assembly, the church (Greek *ekklesia*), as He promised. He does this by “baptizing” disciples in God’s Spirit.

None of this implied that the kingdom would change in character or be established in a “spiritual” form. But it does raise some questions: Why did God not reveal these “secrets” to His earlier prophets? Why did Jesus explain them only to disciples? There is one main answer to both questions: to give Israel an uncluttered choice. Would they repent and humbly accept God’s kingdom as offered? Since they did not find out that the kingdom would be postponed, the issue stayed the same. And their answer was *no*. Consequently, they *killed Messiah Himself!* Since Israel represented all the nations, they made this choice for us all. Through them we all offered “the Lamb of God,” the only sacrifice that can open the door of salvation (the kingdom) for us. If we accept Jesus as King, we get the benefits of that sacrifice—and all He is and does.

After revealing that the kingdom was in effect postponed, Jesus changed His ministry. He began preparing His disciples for His absence. He encouraged them when they finally confessed that He is the Messiah (the Ruler). He began announcing His coming death and resurrection. He repeatedly predicted His glorious return to reign. He revealed, just before His final arrival at Jerusalem, that the kingdom would no longer be near. He would go to heaven to get it, then return with it. On no occasion did He confuse this present evil age with the coming age of the kingdom. Neither should we. His return and His coming kingdom are still our greatest concern!

Important Considerations

BE SURE TO READ THIS!

Why is it so important to understand the promised kingdom? Because it is the grand goal of all God has told us. His kingdom is the Bible's main theme; its coming is our fervent hope. We who are Christians, of course, agree that the final great King is Jesus. We read about His kingdom in nearly every New Testament book. By the name *kingdom* it is mentioned even in the four Gospels 115 times! In Matthew, 53 times; in Mark, 16; in Luke, 41; and in John, 5. Read these examples:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for **the kingdom of heaven** belongs to them.

(Matt. 5:3)

Who is the greatest in **the kingdom of heaven**? (Matt. 18:1)

Children, how hard it is to enter **the kingdom of God**! (Mark 10:24)

They thought that **the kingdom of God** was going to appear immediately.

(Luke 19:11)

“**My kingdom** is not of this world....But now **my kingdom** is from another place.” (John 18:36)

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit **the kingdom of God**?

(1 Cor. 6:9)

Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of **the kingdom that he promised** to those who love him? (James 2:5)

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying: “The kingdom of the world has become **the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ**, and he will reign for ever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15)

Make the Bible more understandable. We do not live by bread alone but by every Word from God, every Word *correctly understood*. As you have just seen, a great many passages depend on the meaning of the kingdom. But what is it? Did Jesus establish it? Is it here now? Is it the church? Is it in heaven? Is it future? Or both present and future? Are you sure you know? According to biblical usage, I mean, not just according to somebody's theology.

Make more of the Bible understandable. Truth about the kingdom ties the Bible together. It clears away our confusion in the Old Testament and makes its prophecies relevant. It can help us feel at home in Matthew, Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation. It meshes with the gospel as presented, for example, in Mark and Acts. It helps explain the gospel's primary emphasis on Jesus' kingship and clarify His royal titles *Christ (Messiah)* and *Son of God*. It justifies the way Paul summarizes the gospel in Romans 1:3-4 and 10:8-10.¹

Make the present and future more understandable. Kingdom truth explains why Jesus did not immediately begin to rule after He rose from death. When He “had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time **he waits** for his enemies to be made his footstool...” (Heb. 10:12-13). Psalm 2:8-9 says He must ask for and receive from

the Father His worldwide inheritance. Kingdom truth recognizes that He has not asked or received it yet. It does not confuse His present occupation with His promised kingdom. He is now occupied ministering the new covenant (Heb. 8:6). He baptizes each believer in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 2:33; 1 Cor. 12:12-13) and puts them into the assembly (*ekklesia*, translated “church”) called His “body.” They will inherit His kingdom *when it comes*.

Kingdom truth also explains the importance of our physical resurrection. Christians with a skewed view of the kingdom rarely mention the resurrection of believers, even in funerals. But passages such as Romans 8:18-25 and 1 Corinthians 15 show that it is essential to both the gospel and the kingdom. “Flesh and blood cannot **inherit the kingdom of God**, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable....For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Cor. 15:50, 53). The apostle Paul risked his life for this doctrine: “I stand on trial,” he said, “because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6b).

Where does the Bible define Jesus’ kingdom? *Well, not in the Gospels themselves!* The books that mention it most do not define it. Why not? Because Gospel readers are already expected to know it from Old Testament prophecies (such as those on page 2). The first verse of the New Testament, Matthew 1:1, shows that kind of dependence. It is like an umbilical cord with five links to the Old Testament (see the Matthew substudy).² These links include a section title from Genesis, a special title for kings over God’s kingdom, and reminders of divine covenants. It is in the Old Testament where we find Jesus’ kingdom defined.

So what is it? This study affirms in the four Gospels the biblical usage for Jesus’ glorious kingdom. It will be essentially what the Old Testament prophecies said: *a perfected form of God’s previous kingdom* over Israel. “The former dominion will be restored...” (Micah 4:8). Here are some common elements in those prophecies:

- All the world worshiping and serving the Lord God
- The main Ruler from the tribe of Judah and the house of David
- All the nations in subjection to Him
- Universal peace and justice
- The restoration of Israel and Judah in the Lord’s favor
- Jerusalem as the capital city
- An eternal covenant, in which God’s Spirit makes people holy
- Material abundance, with the curse removed

That coming “kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Above all, it will be spiritual, because it will be from God. But since it will fulfill God’s plans for the material world and material people, it will also be material and political. The same elements are found or implied in the Spirit-filled prophecies of Luke 1 and 2. We are *still looking for that kingdom* to come. As all the Gospels bear witness, the Ruler was already among us. In Jesus’ presence and power His kingdom touched the earth. But now while He is absent, it is delayed. He did not establish it yet but promised to do so when He returns. Meanwhile, He prepares for that glory all who trust in Him.

The plan of this study. This study is designed for serious Bible students but not experts. It has four substudies, one for each Gospel, then a set of Conclusions and three appendixes. The substudies originated in or as separate studies. Therefore, they differ somewhat in format from each other, and there is some duplication. It is best to read all parts of each substudy. For each Gospel is given a list of references in it that affect understanding of the kingdom. For each reference I have added comments and/or cross-references. The cross-references labeled “SEE...” are to additional or fuller comments at other passages.

The substudies of Matthew and Mark are the most complete. Luke and John are treated as supplementary. Mark and Luke often cross-reference to the Matthew substudy. In it I often show opposite conclusions from summaries of evidence. KINGDOM PRESENT? considers that evidence to prove or be in harmony with the conclusion that the kingdom began. KINGDOM FUTURE considers it to prove or be in harmony with my conclusion that it did not begin. In the final section, labeled “Conclusions...,” the only perspective is that the kingdom is still coming.

Most quotations are from the NIV 1984, but in Mark from the NET Bible. Sometimes instead of *Christ* I use its synonym *Messiah*. The word *gospel* means “good news.” When it refers to a book, I capitalize it. For example, “The **Gospels** were written to present the gospel.”

For much more orientation on the kingdom in the Gospels, see Alva McClain and George N.H. Peters.³ The latter discusses many aspects at length. For amillennial arguments, see Bruce Waltke.⁴

Gospel of Matthew

Except as indicated, Bible quotations are from the Gospel of Matthew in the NIV 1984 version. References beginning “SEE...” are to my comments elsewhere in these substudies. For further details on content see my “Matthew Self Study Guide.”

Introduction

In this first substudy you will see what the Gospel of Matthew says about the kingdom. I urge you to at least look through that book now, marking and/or making notes of everything important about that subject.

The theme of Matthew. Matthew presents the good news that Jesus is the promised King. As required by divine covenants, He is descended from Abraham and King David. John the Baptist testified that the One after him would do away with the wicked but baptize believers in God’s Spirit. When John baptized Jesus in water, God marked Him out with the royal titles of *Christ/Messiah* and *Son of God* (both explained under 3:16-17). By His many miraculous works Jesus proved that He indeed has that capacity to rule. However, He did not let demons testify publicly that He is the King—nor His disciples when they eventually realized it. But just before His passion and triumph, He formally and deliberately presented Himself as such to Israel. His trial and crucifixion centered on His claim to be the King. His resurrection and appearances fully confirmed it. Then He commissioned His disciples to enlist other followers who affirm it.

Kingdom terminology in Matthew. All four Gospels refer to the prophesied kingdom as “the kingdom” or “the kingdom of God.” Matthew, however, most often uses a third term, “the kingdom of heaven.” Only Matthew uses that term, because he writes for Jewish believers. Jews prefer it because it avoids speaking God’s name. It reflects Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45, emphasizing the kingdom’s place of origin. The kingdom will originate in heaven but—as prophecies agree—will be established on earth.

In the following section, “Passages Relating to the Kingdom,” I list many passages in Matthew that bear on the meaning of the kingdom and its offer. With few exceptions I state the relevant information in terms that most knowledgeable interpreters will accept. For some passages I add a summary of related evidence and/or opposing conclusions. **KINGDOM PRESENT?** shows how some interpret it to prove that Jesus’ kingdom began or harmonize with that view. **KINGDOM FUTURE** shows how it proves that the kingdom is still future or harmonizes with that.

Matthew: Passages Relating to the Kingdom

Matthew 1:1 has five links to earlier Scriptures, indicating that there is a process of fulfillment.

- The first two words (*Biblos geneseos*) repeat a section title from Genesis (Gen. 5:1 in the Greek version). The story begun in Genesis is being continued.
- The name *Jesus* is the Greek equivalent of *Joshua* and means “the Lord is salvation.”
- *Christ (Messiah)*, meaning “Anointed One,” was a title for historic kings and for the final, future King. SEE 3:16-17.
- “Abraham” and “David” were recipients of eternal divine covenants to be fulfilled through the Messiah.

Earlier I compared this strong connection to an umbilical cord joining the two Testaments. Its presence reminds us that Matthew continues the Old Testament story. Since Matthew does not define the kingdom, we must find that definition in the Old Testament.

Matthew 1:22-23. “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet... The virgin...will give birth...to Immanuel.” In Jesus were “fulfilled” not only predictions but also the *history* of Israel. Take the two examples in Matthew 2:15 and 18, quoting from Hosea and Jeremiah. The first incident came from the beginning of the Old Testament history of the nation: God called His son (the nation) out of Egypt. The second came from the end of that history: Rachel weeping at the death of her children. Neither passage was given as a prediction; both reviewed history. Yet, each was “fulfilled” in Jesus.

Even Matthew 1:22-23 quotes (Isa. 7:14) from a prophecy that Isaiah apparently saw fulfilled in a preliminary way. That is the obvious meaning of Isaiah 7:15ff., an essential part of the original prophecy.⁵ But, by recapitulating that nation’s history, Jesus is seen to be the most authentic Israel. It is He who accomplishes Israel’s purpose. SEE 12:15-21.

*Remember that I do not agree with **KINGDOM PRESENT?** that the kingdom got established but with **KINGDOM FUTURE**, that it is still coming.*

KINGDOM PRESENT? Such fulfillments show that most kingdom prophecies were being fulfilled.

KINGDOM FUTURE. To interpret prophecies as though most have been fulfilled will cancel many meanings. Every prophecy must be evaluated in its own context and—unless clearly proved otherwise—will be fulfilled in those terms. That approach will discover many fulfillments to wait for, partial fulfillments, and analogous applications.

Matthew 2:15, 18. SEE 1:22-23. In Jesus Israel’s history was recapitulated. Here, God again called His Son out of Egypt and “Rachel” again wept at the death of her children.

Matthew 3:2. First, John the Baptist, then Jesus and His disciples constantly preached that the kingdom had “drawn near” (3:2; 4:17; 10:7). The Greek verb for “draw near” never means “arrive.” SEE Mark 1:14-15 and the footnote there. Reporting the same message, Mark 1:15 adds that Jesus emphasized its newness: “The time has come.” SEE also Luke 10:1-12, about Jesus’ final, deliberate journey to Jerusalem. It strongly emphasizes that the same message was preached in every town ahead of Him. That message was equivalent to “preaching the good news of the kingdom” (4:23; 9:35). Jesus called it “the word about the kingdom” (13:13). But in spite of constantly preaching about the kingdom, *neither John nor Jesus defined it*. They expected the Jews to understand what it is.

Don’t miss this point. New Testament books like Matthew that most often mention the kingdom do not record that Jesus explained it. Assuming that He did not intend to deceive anyone, His procedure strongly implied that the Jews understood. They knew and mostly believed what God had promised about the kingdom. (Read the sample prophecies printed right after the title page.) Neither John nor Jesus ever chided the Jews for misunderstanding the kingdom—but for thinking they were ready for it (e.g., John 3:1-10). Because of their pride, most of them could not accept the predictions that the King would suffer for them (e.g., Isa. 52:13 to 53:12). They still cannot.

Three more things:

- The kingdom’s drawing near was something *new*, as all the first three Gospels emphasize. So, obviously, it had been relatively distant before. It could be neither God’s universal rule nor His rule in some people’s hearts. Both of those are *always present* and cannot draw near!
- The kingdom ceased to be near when Jesus arrived for the final time at Jerusalem. He told the parable in Luke 19:11-27 “because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.” His parable showed that the kingdom would not begin until He returns from heaven.
- God had a reason for bringing the kingdom near (“offering” it through Jesus) when He knew that it would be rejected. In this way He gave Israel the occasion to kill God’s sacrifice for sins (Acts 3:13-15, 17-18). SEE Conclusions.

KINGDOM PRESENT? Since God brought the kingdom near, He was either establishing it or about to establish it in an unexpected form. (Accordingly, some even translate “the kingdom has come.”)

KINGDOM FUTURE. As long as the kingdom was “near,” it had not yet begun. Jesus did not define it because the Jews understood it from the prophecies. He later taught that it was no longer near but that He would return with it. By offering it through Jesus, God set the stage for Israel to kill Messiah as God’s sacrifice for sins.

Matthew 3:6. By submitting to John’s baptism, Israelites were again washing themselves as in Exodus 19:10. This was one of several experiences being re-enacted, such as, God’s miracles of deliverance and manifestations of His Spirit. In Exodus they were being prepared for God to

establish His kingdom on earth, which He did (e.g., Exod. 19:5-6; 25:22; Ps. 114:1-2). In Matthew the kingdom was being offered again. The obedient/repentant ones followed their new Moses to the mountain for his law (Matt. 5-7).

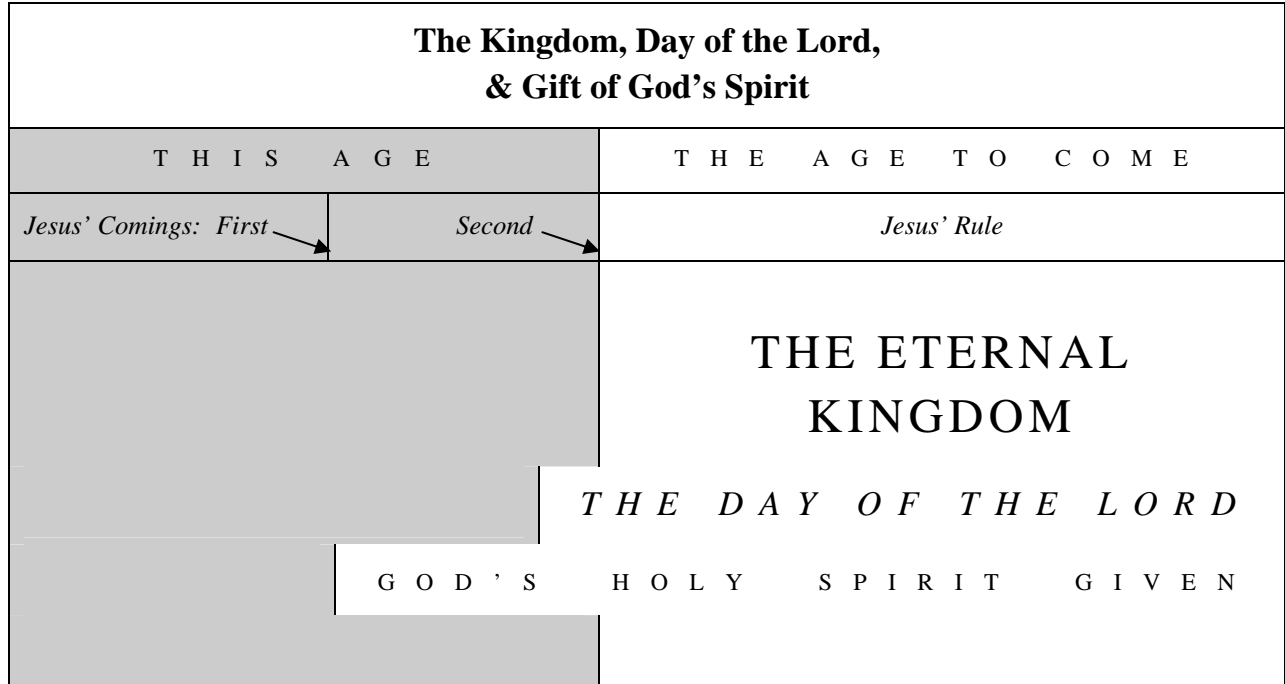
KINGDOM PRESENT? This re-enactment of Exodus implies re-establishment of the kingdom.

KINGDOM FUTURE. We see that it was not re-established mainly because *the results do not fit the predictions about it*. As under 3:2, the issue is whether God might offer the kingdom, then “postpone” it.

Matthew 3:11. “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I...He will baptize you with [that is, *in*] the Holy Spirit and with fire.” This promise is so important that it is recorded in all four Gospels. John the Baptist, who gave it, was “filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth” (Luke 1:15) and appointed by God to be the King’s herald. No matter how much John’s message might extend to us, it was *and still is* for God’s chosen nation, Israel. This promise had been given to them by earlier prophets, such as, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel. They had said that both *before* and *during* His kingdom God would give His Spirit to all His people. John called it “baptism” and designated that Baptizer as *Messiah Himself*.⁶ Remember this in translating 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. It is Jesus (not the Spirit) who baptizes “*in one Spirit*,” as the promise said. By doing so, He constitutes His kingdom people, His *ekklesia*. He began doing it on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5; 2:33).⁷

KINGDOM PRESENT? By giving the Holy Spirit from God’s throne, Jesus began to rule.

KINGDOM FUTURE. This gift and the signs point to the future. Joel, for example, predicted both for “**before** the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Joel 2:31b, quoted in Acts 2:20). Since the kingdom will come **during** that “day of the Lord,” what happened on Pentecost could be and was **before** the kingdom. See the following chart.



Matthew 3:12. John also warned that the “greater one” coming after him would judge the world. “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (3:12). This described the “greater one” beginning to rule. Yet, Jesus did not do that. Also SEE 11:2-4 about John’s question—and Jesus’ answer—when Jesus did not right the injustice that put John in prison.

KINGDOM PRESENT? Since John spoke by the Spirit when he predicted judgment, some form of Messiah’s kingdom must have started.

KINGDOM FUTURE. The kingdom will begin just as John pictured it, but after a delay John did not foresee.

Matthew 3:16-17. Jesus’ royal titles strengthen Matthew’s main theme of Jesus’ kingship. Sometimes He is simply called “King” (e.g., 2:2, 6; 27:11, 37). But often He is called *Christ/Messiah* (that is, “the One *anointed* to rule”) or *Son of God* (that is, God’s Heir). As affirmed by the Greek verb in Hebrews 1:4-5, He *acquired* these two titles. That happened when John baptized Him: He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and God called Him “Son” (3:16, 17; also 4:3, 6; 8:29; 27:43, 54; cf. Ps. 2:2, 7-9; Acts 10:38). Sometimes the two titles are treated as synonymous (e.g., Luke 4:41). They also both figure in the Great Confession (SEE 16:13-20). Jesus’ miracles (SEE chapters 8-9) verify that He has the ability to rule.

KINGDOM PRESENT? Since Jesus is the King/Anointed One/Son, He must be reigning.

KINGDOM FUTURE. Just as David was anointed to the same office long before he began to rule, so was Jesus.

Matthew 4:3, 6. “Son of God.” SEE 3:16-17.

Matthew 4:17. SEE 3:2. Like John the Baptist, Jesus constantly preached that the kingdom had drawn near. That message is key to Division I of Matthew. After the introductory chapters (1:1 to 4:16), Division I begins at 4:17: “*From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’*” So Division I emphasizes the nearness of the kingdom. It closes with the Great Confession that Jesus is King. At that point (16:21) the same phrase (“*From that time on Jesus began...*”) occurs again, opening Division II, which leads to the Lord’s passion and triumph.

Matthew 4:23. “preaching the good news of the kingdom.” SEE 3:2.

Matthew chapters 5-7. This is the Sermon on the Mount, the King’s words to those expecting the kingdom, especially the repentant ones. SEE 3:6. The interpreter should not neglect the setting Matthew emphasizes. Both before and after this sermon, he reports the constant message that the kingdom *had drawn near* (Matt. 4:17; 10:7). Therefore, it was still normally spoken of as future. Take the Beatitudes (5:3-12), for example, in which the kingdom is the prize for those who repent. Six of those blessings are given in the future tense, such as, “they **will inherit** the earth.” But twice it says “theirs **is** [Greek *estin*] the kingdom” (vv. 3, 10), and once, “Great **is** your reward in heaven.” Yet, they were *not in the kingdom yet!* In fact, He proceeded, “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, **you will certainly not enter** the kingdom” (Matt. 5:20). So the kingdom was still future. We should pray for it to come (6:10) and should seek it more than food and clothing (6:33).

A few other passages also speak of it as present. In terms like the Beatitudes, the kingdom is for the childlike (19:14). It is also pictured as a treasure to seek (5:33; 13:44, 45) or a mansion to enter (23:13). “Who **is** the greatest in the kingdom?” asked the disciples (18:1), though they knew it was future (see 18:3). How, then, do we explain using the present tense? Because we sometimes speak that way of great goals drawn near. For the same reason we can speak of the future resurrection as present. Matthew 22:30 says, “At the resurrection people **will** neither **marry** nor **be given in marriage**; they **will be** like the angels in heaven.” All three bolded verbs translated as future are *present tense* in Greek. A quite different passage that also speaks of the future resurrection in the present tense is 1 Corinthians 15:12, 13, 15, 16. For a different reason for speaking of the kingdom as present, SEE 12:25-29.

KINGDOM PRESENT? The kingdom was sometimes spoken of as present because the Lord was inaugurating it.

KINGDOM FUTURE. It was still really future but sometimes spoken of as present because it is our great goal (which had drawn near). In each such context, other verses show that it was still future. For example, it is referred to in 18:1-4 in both present tense and future tense.

Matthew 5:20. “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, **you will certainly not enter** the kingdom of heaven.” This is an example of picturing the kingdom’s being established in the future—or being entered in the future (e.g., 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:24). That agrees with the constant announcement that the kingdom was near, and therefore not yet established, during Jesus’ ministry. SEE 5:3-12.

Matthew 6:9-13. “This, then, is how you should pray:…your kingdom come…”

KINGDOM PRESENT? The kingdom has a present form. Praying for it to come includes wanting its present form to grow.

KINGDOM FUTURE. Its coming should be one of our highest concerns. It would be confusing to pray for it to come, however, if it were already here. Various Scriptures predict its future coming; none says clearly that it has already started.

Matthew 6:33. “Seek first his kingdom.” SEE 5:3-12; 5:20.

Matthew 7:21-23. Looks to the future day of judgment as the time to enter the kingdom or be excluded. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ **will enter the kingdom** of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me **on that day**, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name…?’” (7:21-22). SEE 5:20.

HAVE YOU TRULY REPENTED AND LET GOD TRANSFORM YOU, ASSURING THAT YOU WILL ENTER HIS KINGDOM?

Matthew chapters 8-9. Jesus’ miracles reflected prophetic descriptions of the coming kingdom. For example, chapters 8-9 and 11:20-24 have several of the same features as Isaiah 35. Accordingly, Hebrews 6:5 says that Jews “tasted…the **powers** [the usual word for miracles] of the coming age.” Jesus’ miracles at least gave evidence that He was the expected “coming one” (Matt. 11:2-6). He was and is capable of bringing *the kind of kingdom that had been predicted*.

Again I remind you that I do not agree with KINGDOM PRESENT? but with KINGDOM FUTURE.

KINGDOM PRESENT? Since the miracles made predicted changes, the kingdom was beginning.

KINGDOM FUTURE. The miracles were merely samples of kingdom power, not the kingdom itself. When Hebrews 6:5 much later called them “miracles of the coming age,” it referred to that age as still “coming” (still future). Although they *could have renewed the world* if they had continued, they ceased. But Jesus promised “the renewal of all things” at His Second Coming (Matt. 19:28).

Matthew 9:8. “God…had given such authority to men.” SEE Mark 2:5-11.

Matthew 9:35. “preaching the good news of the kingdom.” SEE 3:2.

Matthew 10:7. “the kingdom of heaven is near.” SEE 3:2.

Matthew 11:2-6. “Now when John heard in prison about the deeds Christ had done, he sent his disciples to ask a question: 11:3 ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?’ 11:4 Jesus answered them, ‘Go tell John what you hear and see: 11:5 The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them....’” After months in prison, John wanted to make sure that Jesus was the Messiah. He had seen and heard God acknowledge Jesus at His baptism. But Jesus was not bringing justice as John had testified. The answer to John’s doubts was Jesus’ miracles. They were the evidence that He could do it all. SEE chapters 8-9.

Matthew 11:12. Matthew chapters 11 and 12 give evidence that the generation of John and Jesus was rejecting them both. Instead of accepting God’s kingdom meekly, they were doing it violence. That is the meaning of 11:12 as correctly translated by the NASB: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven **suffers violence**, and **violent men take it by force** [or, **plunder** it].” The bolded words are the normal meanings for the Greek. If 11:12 has these normal meanings, it does not speak of the kingdom growing but being plundered. By using meanings that are not normal, however, the NIV makes the verse paint a positive picture: “the kingdom of heaven **has been forcefully advancing**, and **forceful men lay hold of it.**” That picture is misleading. (SEE also Luke 16:16 and my comments there.)

KINGDOM PRESENT? Whether 11:12 portrays advance or opposition, each implies that the kingdom had begun.

KINGDOM FUTURE. Instead, the point is that the leaders did not let it begin. By opposing John and Jesus, they did not humbly accept the kingdom but “plundered” it for their own purposes.

Matthew 11:20-24. Jesus’ miracles proved that the kingdom was near—even touching Israel. The cities that saw them should have repented, but they didn’t. “Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent” (11:20). By sinning against the light, they were guiltier than others who lack the light. Therefore, the Judge Himself added, “It will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you” (11:24). SEE 4:17 and chapters 8-9.

Matthew 12:15-21. Here is quoted as being fulfilled in Jesus the first of four “Servant Songs” from Isaiah. This song (Isa. 42:1-4) emphasizes (a) how God delights in His Servant and enables Him, also (b) the worldwide justice (that is, His kingdom) the Servant brings about. “Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and

he will proclaim justice to the nations...In his name the nations will put their hope.” This first song suggests what others make explicit, that the Servant must suffer before He is exalted. In Isaiah He is often called “Israel” because He fulfills Israel’s mission. SEE 1:22-23.

Matthew 12:25-29. The kingdom had “come upon” them, as seen in Jesus’ power over demons (12:25-29). The NET Bible translates 12:28 as follows: “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God **has** already **overtaken you.**”

KINGDOM PRESENT? The kingdom was present because He was inaugurating it. The NET Bible text note for 12:28 concludes that “the arrival of the kingdom” was not “merely anticipated” but “already in process.”

KINGDOM FUTURE. The kingdom was present only in its representatives; it left when the Lord left. The fact that it touched earth during Jesus’ ministry did not require or make certain that it would be established soon. What passage says that it was established? If established, where is it? and why is it so different from what was prophesied? Where is the **abundance** of miracles that gave evidence of its nearness?⁸

Matthew 12:39-45. This chapter completes the initial evidence that Jesus’ generation would reject the King. Remember that in 11:20 He “began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.” In 12:39-45 He four times referred to His entire “generation” as wicked. By gathering such evidence, the Gospel of Matthew prepared for Jesus’ change in teaching in chapter 13.

Matthew chapter 13.⁹ “Secrets of [about] the kingdom.” SEE also on Mark 4:26-34. Here Jesus used a new method of teaching: (a) telling parables with meanings that His audience did not perceive, then (b) explaining them only to those with “ears to hear” (Matt. 13:9, 16, 43). As a result, only His disciples understood. He called this information “secrets [KJV has “mysteries”] of the kingdom” (v. 11). It was new information (see Romans 16:25-26) about the kingdom, the same predicted kingdom that had drawn near. He revealed it now because the trend of Israel’s unbelief had become unmistakable. In effect God had offered Israel a package: the kingdom along with Jesus the Messiah. But they were rejecting His offer. This would lead to Messiah’s death and ascension to heaven—and an important change about the kingdom. God, of course, had planned all this, but had not revealed some aspects to His prophets. So these parables helped prepare the disciples for the apparent change. In Conclusions we will consider why God waited so long to start revealing this.

The main interpretive issue is to find the kingdom in these parables. In general they pictured a process from small to great, then ultimate triumph along with judgment. Many consider the kingdom to be the whole process, a view that brings confusion to many succeeding Scriptures. Instead, the kingdom is the ultimate triumph. The same kingdom that drew near has been postponed but will come after a preparatory waiting period. That is what the disciples must have

understood. And *they did understand*, as the Lord acknowledged at the beginning (Matt. 13:11-12) and end (vv. 51-52) of this series. How do we know what they understood?

- They were pre-conditioned from the many earlier prophecies to see the kingdom in the grand ending of such parables.
- The Lord Himself gave a model explanation with the kingdom appearing at the end. See below.
- Subsequent passages in the Gospels and Acts usually refer to the kingdom as future and never suggest (a) that a “spiritual” kingdom began or (b) that there is a present form as well as the future glorious one.

The Lord’s model explanation was for the parable usually called “The Wheat and the Tares” (v. 24). This was the first one in which He said, “The kingdom of heaven is like...” This was a common introduction in which a rabbi alerted disciples that a story was about a certain subject. The subject might appear in the story. In Jesus’ model parable the kingdom is clearly *not* like the first thing mentioned, which was “a man who sowed good seed.” Neither did the Lord identify anything else as the kingdom early in the parable: “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man [Jesus]. **The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom**” (vv. 37-38). So these “sons of the kingdom” are not in the kingdom yet but are in “the world.” The Lord identified nothing as the kingdom until “the end of the age,” a phrase here emphasized by being repeated in verses 39 and 40. At that time He will set up His kingdom. That includes sending His angels to “weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil...Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (vv. 41, 43). So there is no indication that He will rule until He judges “at the end of the age.” That judging “at the end of the age” is also how the Parable of the Net concludes (vv. 48-50). So the Lord’s explanation validates the disciples’ tendency to see the kingdom as the grand culmination of each parable. It will take place in “the age to come.”

KINGDOM PRESENT? In these parables all stages of the process depict the kingdom. Therefore, it began during Jesus’ first coming or immediately thereafter.

KINGDOM FUTURE. The kingdom is not the whole process in the parables but the grand result. That is where the disciples, who understood, must have seen it. It is also where Jesus located it in the one “kingdom-is-like” parable He interpreted. It also agrees with His promises to come, judge, and rule (SEE 16:27).

Matthew 13:13. “the word about the kingdom.” SEE 3:2.

Matthew 13:36-43, 48-50. The King comes to judge and to install His righteous and glorious kingdom “at the end of the age.” SEE chapter 13.

Matthew 14:22, 34. “go on ahead of him to the other side.” SEE 21:31.

Matthew 16:13-20. A major turning point in Matthew is the Great Confession by Jesus' disciples (16:13-20). Jesus' titles and promises in this passage all relate to the kingdom. First, the disciples confessed Him through Simon their spokesman. They acknowledged His kingship by according Him two royal titles: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (SEE 3:16-17 and Mark 8:29.) In response Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter and promised that "on this rock I will build my church [Greek *ekklesia*]." *Ekklesia* was a well-known term in the Greek Old Testament for Israel as God's *kingdom assembly* (e.g., Deut. 10:4). It had been used in Psalm 22:22 (quoted in Heb. 2:12) for the assembly in the future kingdom. Jesus immediately emphasized that royal meaning; He promised to give the disciples' spokesman the keys of the coming kingdom, that is, authority in it.

KINGDOM PRESENT? For the King to build His kingdom assembly is equivalent to starting the kingdom. This explains why the Epistles sometimes speak of believers as in His kingdom (e.g., Col. 1:13; 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6) with heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20).

KINGDOM FUTURE. An official can be acknowledged and his people be prepared before he takes office. Jesus is King, and the church is His people, who belong to His coming kingdom. But the kingdom *as repeatedly described in prophecies* has not yet appeared. Jesus' royal titles in this Great Confession are the essence of the gospel and point straight to His coming kingdom.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE RULER, THE MESSIAH? IS HE YOUR LORD?

Matthew 16:21. "From that time on Jesus began..." SEE 4:17. Here begins the second main division of Matthew. It shows the climactic importance of the Great Confession just recorded (16:13-20).

Matthew 16:27. On several occasions Jesus promised to come back in glory and rule over the earth. For examples, see 13:40-43; 16:27; 19:28-29; and 25:31-46. Among other things, that coming kingdom is identified as "the renewal of all things" (19:28), an eternal inheritance (25:34), and eternal life (19:29; 25:46).

KINGDOM PRESENT? Prophecies like this refer to the **glorious** stage of the kingdom but do not deny its present stage.

KINGDOM FUTURE. Every Gospel passage like these (that clearly speak of the believers' hope) points to the Lord's coming again to rule on earth. That is the same hope stated in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 3:13. In other words, we look for heaven on earth, not heaven in heaven. (No passage clearly says that we will be carried to heaven. And none pictures a supposed present form of the Lord's kingdom side-by-side with that glorious future.)

Matthew 16:28. "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." All three Synoptic Gospels and especially 2 Peter 1 show that this happened in the Transfiguration a week later. It is evident that the kingdom was still future when He said this. SEE Mark 8:38 to 9:1 and Luke 9:26-27.

Matthew 18:1-4. Occasionally Jesus or His disciples spoke of the kingdom as though it were present, though the context shows that it was not. For example, in 18:1 they asked “who **is** the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” But they knew that it was not present yet and that they were not in it. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus warned them, “unless you change and become like little children, you **will never enter** the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (18:3-4). Similarly, on a different occasion He emphasized that the kingdom belongs to the childlike (19:14). SEE 5:3-12 and Mark 10:14-15.

Matthew 19:14. Using words mostly identical to 5:3 and 10, the Lord says that the (coming) kingdom of heaven belongs to the childlike. SEE 18:1-4 and comments at Mark 10:14.

Matthew 19:28-29. “at the renewal of things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne....” SEE 16:27 and Mark 10:17-30.

Matthew 21:1-11. SEE Mark 11:7-10. Here Jesus offered Himself as Jerusalem’s King. During nearly all His ministry He kept demons and disciples from confessing Him publicly as King. But just before His passion and triumph, He had His disciples borrow a donkey so He could ride it into Jerusalem (21:5, 9). In this way He deliberately fulfilled Zechariah 9:9, which said how the King would come to that city. He did not proceed to fulfill the next verse, however, which said,

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the war-horses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zech. 9:10)

KINGDOM PRESENT? Jesus’ entering Jerusalem as King was inaugurating His kingdom, although not the kind of kingdom they expected.

KINGDOM FUTURE. This was a legitimate offer of the kingdom *as predicted*, which Jerusalem and its people turned down. Therefore, the next verse in Zechariah 9 was not changed in meaning but “postponed” (for later fulfillment).

Matthew 21:31. The NIV translation of 21:31 pictures sinners already entering the kingdom. It quotes Jesus as saying to the leaders of Israel, “tax collectors and prostitutes **are entering** the kingdom of God **ahead of** you.” Most English translations have something similar, though some change to future time (NASB, “**will get into** the kingdom”). However, the bolded words represent a Greek expression (*proagousin eis*) which really does not picture anyone arriving to or entering the kingdom. Its meaning can be seen in 14:22, where the same Greek verb and prepo-

sition are more accurately translated. Jesus had the disciples get into the boat and “**go on ahead of him to the other side.**” They went ahead, as the Greek indicates; yet they *did not arrive* first (14:34). Accordingly, 21:31 means that wicked people were ahead of the leaders on the way to the kingdom.¹⁰

KINGDOM PRESENT? Since the kingdom was being entered, it had to be present.

KINGDOM FUTURE. No one was entering. The kingdom was still down the road, as the Greek allows.

Matthew 21:43. Jesus described God’s “kingdom” as a vineyard being cared for by Israel’s leaders. It would be taken away from them and given to “a people who will produce its fruit” (21:43). This probably means the church, which is called a people/nation in Romans 10:19 and 1 Peter 2:9. But Paul’s discussion of Gentiles’ being grafted onto Israel’s “olive tree” (Romans 11) shows that God’s promises to that nation continue. George N.H. Peters discusses all this in great detail.¹¹ SEE more commentary in Mark 12:1-12.

KINGDOM PRESENT? Its being transferred implies that the kingdom is actively present. Since the church is the recipient people/nation, it is at least the core of the present kingdom.

KINGDOM FUTURE. The parable does not represent the kingdom as active. It is true that the vineyard was constantly tended and got transferred. But it could not represent the kingdom as active, because that had been suspended centuries before. It was not the kingdom in operation that was transferred but the kingdom **program**. That is what the church is now tending.

Matthew 22:30. All three bolded verbs in this verse are present tense in Greek. “At the resurrection people **will** neither **marry** nor **be given in marriage**; they **will be** like the angels in heaven” (22:30). This is a case of picturing a great future as though it were present. SEE 5:3-12 and Mark 12:18-27.

Matthew 22:41-46. “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet” (22:44). SEE Mark 12:35-37 for commentary.

KINGDOM PRESENT? Since Messiah has all authority (Ephesians 1:20-22), sitting at God’s right hand means that He is ruling.

KINGDOM FUTURE. Psalm 110 and its New Testament commentaries agree that He is now “waiting” (not ruling) on His Father’s throne. Scriptures consistently distinguish between that and the Davidic throne promised to Him (e.g., Ps. 89:4, 14, 29; Rev. 3:21).

Matthew 23:13. Religious leaders did damage to the kingdom and the people. In 23:13 Jesus accused them of shutting off the kingdom—neither entering it nor letting others enter. Entering had been a real possibility; the kingdom had truly been offered. But no one entered, because the leaders did not let that happen.

KINGDOM PRESENT? The kingdom could be entered because it was being established.

KINGDOM FUTURE. It could have been established and entered if it had been humbly received. But instead, the leaders effectively “closed” it by causing its postponement. No one entered because it did not begin. They could not have accomplished that if the kingdom were merely spiritual. SEE 11:12.

Matthew chapters 24-25. These chapters in Matthew are the most extensive report of the Olivet Discourse, which is found also in Mark and Luke. In it the Lord deals with events that must occur before He returns to begin His rule. That goal is referred to in 24:30-31 as “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” and sending out angels to “gather his elect.” Verses 32-34 say that “all these things” must happen before “it is near, right at the door.” The parallel verse, Luke 21:31, specifies that the “kingdom of God” will be near.

KINGDOM PRESENT? Since this prophetic discourse looks to the future glorious form of His kingdom, it does not affect our understanding of its present form.

KINGDOM FUTURE. As in every other prediction of the kingdom’s coming, there is no hint of a present form.

Matthew 25:31-46. This final prediction of the Lord’s Olivet Discourse gives great emphasis to His Second Coming to earth *to rule*. Coming “in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will **sit on his throne** in heavenly glory” (v. 31) and judge the nations. Then those who have demonstrated their faith by deeds of love will “take [their] inheritance, the kingdom” (v. 34), which inheritance is later called “eternal life” (v. 46). The rest “will go away to eternal punishment.” SEE 16:27 and chapters 24-25.

Matthew 26:28. Jesus called His blood to be shed on the cross the “blood of the covenant” (26:28). His words were taken from Exodus 24:8. There they referred to the blood of animals inaugurating God’s first covenant with Israel when making them His kingdom. By using the same words here, Jesus meant that His sacrifice would inaugurate the new and eternal covenant. This will operate in the promised (restored) kingdom (Heb. 7:12, 18-19).

KINGDOM PRESENT? Inauguration of the eternal covenant implies inauguration of the eternal kingdom.

KINGDOM FUTURE. The covenant is more extensive than the kingdom, cleansing even “the heavenly things” (Heb. 9:23). At any rate, it has to be in effect *before* the kingdom, to prepare people for it.

Matthew 28:18. When God raised Jesus from death, He gave Him “all authority” (Matt. 28:18; cf. Eph. 1:20-22). That acknowledged Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the ultimate Ruler. SEE 16:13-20.

KINGDOM PRESENT? Jesus’ receiving all authority means He began His rule

KINGDOM FUTURE. It means He is fully ready to reign when His enemies are subjected. He is ruling only in the sense in which King David ruled in the years before Saul died (e.g., 1 Sam. 22:1-2). David was already anointed and had His small faithful band of followers—but his and their kingdom was still future. So is ours.

HAVE YOU BEEN BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT? DO YOU OBEY WHAT THE SON COMMANDS? DO YOU HELP MAKE DISCIPLES?

Gospel of Mark

In this substudy each item begins by quoting the relevant Bible passage from the NET Bible. All bolding is mine. References beginning "SEE..." are to my comments elsewhere in these substudies, usually Matthew.

Introduction

I urge you to read all of Mark now, marking and/or making notes of everything it says about the gospel or the kingdom. In this substudy I will emphasize two facts about each subject.

About the gospel I will show

- that the purpose of the Gospel of Mark is to present the gospel.
- that the gospel is based on Jesus' Messiahship (kingship) rather than His divinity.

About Jesus' kingdom I will show

- that it is not defined in Mark (nor any Gospel) but in the Old Testament.
- that it did not begin during Jesus' ministry but is still coming.

I have added heavy black captions in all-capital letters. One caption, "Jesus Doing Good and Healing," covers most of the book: 1:14 through 13:37. In an appendix the same captions will help show that Mark represents Peter's gospel preaching.

Mark: Passages Relating to the Kingdom

GOOD NEWS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mark introduces his whole book as the good news (the "gospel") that people need to hear and believe for salvation. (In Mark the term *gospel* is also used in 1:14, 15; 8:35; 13:10; 14:9; and 16:15.) The gospel presents Jesus as the Ruler of the coming kingdom. This first verse in Mark lists two royal titles for Him: "Christ, the Son of God." Both titles were predicted centuries earlier (e.g., both are in Psalm 2) and point to His coming kingdom. I will explain each of them at verses 9-11, which show Him acquiring them at His baptism.

JOHN'S BAPTISM

Mark 1:4 In the wilderness John the baptizer began preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 1:5 People from the whole Judean

countryside and all of Jerusalem were going out to him, and he was baptizing them in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.... 1:7 He proclaimed, "One more powerful than I am is coming after me; I am not worthy to bend down and untie the strap of his sandals. 1:8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Mark begins the gospel story with the ministry of John the Baptist, when Jesus was grown. Matthew and Luke, in contrast, begin the story before Jesus' birth. That does not mean that Mark's gospel is defective—but that Matthew and Luke give more than what is essential. All three report that God sent John to prepare the Jewish people for "the Lord" God to come bringing salvation (Mark 1:2-3). John was baptizing many who came in response to his call to repent. He said that a greater one would come after him and would baptize them with (better, in) the Holy Spirit. Jesus was that greater one—and the key to God's salvation. SEE Matthew 3:11.

Jesus began His great work of baptizing believers in the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:38; 11:15-17). Former prophets had predicted that God would give His Spirit before the coming kingdom (Joel 2:28-31) and as an essential feature of it (e.g., Ezek. 36:24-30). Since the Spirit was not given until Pentecost (John 7:39), the kingdom surely did not begin before then. But the Spirit is not the only feature essential to the kingdom. Therefore, in perfect harmony with the Gospels, it will not begin until the Lord Jesus returns.

Matthew and Luke report more of John the Baptist's preaching than Mark does. The baptizer was by no means misled or biased. "He was filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth" (Luke 1:15). What else (besides baptize in the Spirit) did He expect the "greater one" to do? To "clean out his threshing floor and...gather his wheat into the storehouse, but the chaff he will burn up..." (Matt. 3:12, which SEE). In other words, John expected Jesus soon to publicly judge mankind and inaugurate His kingdom on earth.

JESUS ANOINTED

Mark 1:9 Now in those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. 1:10 And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 1:11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my one dear Son; in you I take great delight."

SEE Matthew 3:16-17. This incident took place when Jesus submitted to John's baptism. He did so in solidarity with His people, who were preparing for God to bring salvation. What happened on that occasion is emphasized in all four Gospels and Acts. In other words, all five tell us what happened when Jesus was baptized. But only one of the five, only the Gospel of John, clearly teaches that Jesus was divine and existed before He became a man. Jesus' pre-existence and divinity, though undeniable and very important, are not unequivocally taught in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or Acts. Appar-

ently, they are not essential to the gospel. But what happened at His baptism is taught in all and is essential to the gospel.

On that occasion Jesus acquired the two royal titles mentioned in Mark 1:1. The first title, *Christ*, represents the Greek word for anointed or Anointed One (*Cristos*).¹² He is anointed with God's Holy Spirit in order to rule (Ps. 2:2; Isa. 11:2). Though the title was not mentioned here by name, it became Jesus' title on this occasion. When God's Spirit came upon Him "like a dove" (v. 10), He became God's *Christ*.

On the same occasion He became the Son of God as a man. God so acknowledged Him from heaven, quoting in part from Psalm 2:7-8. Hebrews 1:5 quotes from the same passage, proving that *Son* is a "name he has inherited" (that is, "acquired by inheritance," Heb. 1:4). Psalm 2 proceeds to show that His new name/title means that He will inherit all of God's creation.¹³

*Psalm 2:7 "You are my son! This very day I have become your father!
2:8 Ask me,
and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,
the ends of the earth as your personal property..."*

JESUS DOING GOOD AND HEALING

Mark 1:14 Now after John was imprisoned, Jesus went into Galilee and proclaimed the gospel of God. 1:15 He said, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel!"

SEE Matthew 3:2. The "gospel" began when the promised kingdom drew near. In verse 15 the Greek verb for "is near" (*engiken*) means "has drawn near." The verb never means "has arrived."¹⁴ Peter's use of the same form years later illustrates this point. He said that "the culmination of all things is near" (1 Pet. 4:7). Yet, what was near did not come immediately; "all things" have still not culminated. In the same way, Jesus' kingdom was near through nearly all His ministry but was not established. He and His disciples continually said that it was near (Matt. 4:17 and 10:7)—nearly until the time of His final passion and triumph in Jerusalem (see Luke 10:9, 11).

What was this kingdom that drew near? If you took notes all through Mark, you never saw Jesus and His disciples define it. Why not? Because the Jews who heard their message already knew the prophecies that defined it. We are obligated to read and believe those same prophecies. For a few of the examples in one book, read the selections from Isaiah 2, 11, and 35 on page 2.

One more thing: Many assume that if the kingdom drew near, it must have started soon. Not so. There was a powerful reason for it to draw near without being established. I will discuss that reason in Conclusions. For now, it is enough to notice what

the parable in Luke 19:11-27 says about it. It will start only when the Lord returns from the “distant country” He has gone to.

Luke 19:11 ...Jesus proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. 19:12 Therefore he said, “A nobleman went to a distant country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return.... 19:15 When he returned after receiving the kingdom, he summoned....”

Mark 1:21 Then they went to Capernaum. When the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. 1:22 The people there were amazed by his teaching, because he taught them like one who had authority, not like the experts in the law.

The One who will rule the world must not only be mighty but also wise and understanding. From the beginning of His ministry Jesus showed such excellence. Probably the most learned men in the world were the Jewish experts in God’s law (KJV, scribes). But Jesus was greater.

*Isaiah 11:2 The Lord’s spirit will rest on him –
a spirit that gives extraordinary wisdom,
a spirit that provides the ability to execute plans,
a spirit that produces absolute loyalty to the Lord.*

Mark 1:32 When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and demon-possessed. 1:33 The whole town gathered by the door. 1:34 So he healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons. But he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

SEE Matthew chapters 8-9. Like all the other Gospels, Mark records a number of Jesus’ miracles. Their power and variety show that He could bring a kingdom just like the one described by the prophets. That is what Hebrews 6:5 means by saying people had “tasted...the powers [same word as miracles] of the coming age.” It also explains why Jesus’ answer would encourage John the Baptist when John began to doubt (SEE Matt. 11:4-5).

Mark 2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 2:6 Now some of the experts in the law were sitting there, turning these things over in their minds: 2:7 “Why does this man speak this way? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 2:8 Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, “Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? 2:9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up, take your stretcher, and walk’? 2:10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” – he said to the paralytic – 2:11 “I tell you, stand up, take your stretcher, and go home.”

On this occasion Jesus proved by His miracle that He had forgiven the man's sins in response to faith. Many nowadays agree with the "experts in the law" that no one "can forgive sins but God alone." Therefore, they decide that on this occasion Jesus was claiming and proving to be God. Well, He is God; but it is doubtful that He claimed that here. (It would be the only such claim in all His miracles in Mark.) Instead, He forgave as "the **Son of Man** [who] has authority on earth to forgive sins." In other words, as the man par excellence with the fullness of God's Spirit "that gives extraordinary wisdom" (Isa. 11:2). This interpretation agrees with the conclusion in Matthew 9:8: "When the crowd saw this, they were afraid and honored God who had given such authority **to men.**" Furthermore, the risen Lord promised His disciples, "If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained" (John 20:23). This authority for "men" and for "disciples" does not prove their divinity.

Mark 2:19 Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they do not fast. 2:20 But the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and at that time they will fast.

Jesus' claiming to be the bridegroom reflects Old Testament pictures of the kingdom (e.g., Isa. 62:1-5). However, the prediction of His being taken away (and His followers fasting) does not. He did not explain this until later, starting in His parables about the kingdom. It involves His coming twice, which had not been revealed to the prophets (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Mark 3:11 (cf. 5:7) And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." 3:12 But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

Demons recognized that Jesus is God's royal Heir (His Son), but He ordered them not to tell the people. (Luke 4:41 shows that the title they used, "the Son of God," is equivalent to "the Christ.") Why did He keep the demons from giving this true witness? Probably because the people would be unable to respond properly. Not knowing that the Son must go to heaven and come back later, they would have insisted that He begin His rule at once.

Mark 3:22 The experts in the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and, "By the ruler of demons he casts out demons." 3:23 So he called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan? 3:24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom will not be able to stand. 3:25 If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 3:26 And if Satan rises against himself and is divided, he is not able to stand and his end has come. 3:27 But no one is able to enter a strong man's house and steal his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can thoroughly plunder his house."

This excerpt follows reports of various sorts of opposition to Jesus (2:1 to 3:6). The incident including this quotation (3:20-30) brought that opposition to a climax. It also

triggered a major change in Jesus' teaching methods, which we will see next. At this point the religious experts had come to the conclusion that Jesus' power was Satanic. After His argument in verses 23-27, He warned them of unpardonable sin in verses 28-29.

Now consider His argument. Jesus' success in casting out demons showed His power against Satan's kingdom. It was like entering the strong man's house and tying him up in order to "plunder his house."¹⁵ On this occasion Jesus said the words most often cited by those who think His kingdom started: "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28, which SEE). Indeed, the kingdom touched earth but did not start.

Mark 4:9 And he said, "Whoever has ears to hear had better listen!" 4:10 When he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. 4:11 He said to them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those outside, everything is in parables, 4:12 so that although they look they may look but not see, and although they hear they may hear but not understand, so they may not repent and be forgiven."

SEE Matthew chapter 13. At this point Jesus had begun a new tactic: teaching new information in parables. He explained that He used this method so that (a) only those with "with ears to hear" would understand but (b) others would continue in their ignorance and lack of repentance. He reiterated the same dual purpose in 4:33-34 after two "kingdom is like" parables (see below). He could hardly have been more explicit, as recorded by all the first three Gospels. So He was not using parables to help all understand but deliberately hiding from some what He revealed to others! In "Conclusions" I will explain why He did this.

*The subject of these parables was the secrets of the kingdom, that is, previously unrevealed truths about it. Many assume that the Lord revealed a new **form** of the expected kingdom. That assumption seems to be unwarranted, as I will show.*

Mark 4:26 He also said, "The kingdom of God is like someone who spreads seed on the ground. 4:27 He goes to sleep and gets up, night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 4:28 By itself the soil produces a crop, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 4:29 And when the grain is ripe, he sends in the sickle because the harvest has come."

4:30 He also asked, "To what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to present it? 4:31 It is like a mustard seed that when sown in the ground, even though it is the smallest of all the seeds in the ground – 4:32 when it is sown, it grows up, becomes the greatest of all garden plants, and grows large branches so that the wild birds can nest in its shade."

4:33 So with many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear. 4:34 He did not speak to them without a parable. But privately he explained everything to his own disciples.

SEE Matthew chapter 13. These two parables reveal that “the kingdom of God is like” something. We must not misinterpret this introduction, which was often used by Jewish rabbis. It simply means that the story has to do with the subject, which is here the kingdom. Usually the subject can be seen or implied in the story. It need not be a present reality, certainly not the first thing mentioned in the parable. In the first parable here, for example, the first thing is the sower (“who spreads seed”). But no one thinks that the kingdom is like the sower! In fact, it is probably not like the seed spread on the ground nor the seed sprouting and growing. Instead—and I will call this View A—it is like the harvest, the great culmination. That is where the disciples would see it.

Why do I say that? Because the disciples understood these parables. Jesus “spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear” (v. 33) and “explained everything” to them (v. 34). What were they most “able to hear” and understand? The kind of kingdom they had learned about in Old Testament prophecies (see p. 2), best represented by the harvest. If so, the parable did not depict the kingdom as in operation throughout the process but at its end.

And what would they see as the kingdom in the second parable? Not the mustard seed nor the seed when sown, but the final plant with its large branches (cf. Ezek. 17:22-24). If this View A is valid, what did the Lord reveal in both parables? Not a new or different kind of kingdom but an unforeseen waiting period for the predicted one. The King’s followers belong to the future kingdom but have to wait for it. For the present they are the kingdom only in an embryonic sense.

Many interpreters prefer View B of these parables: that the kingdom has begun and is pictured from the beginning of each parable. Even in the sowing, the kingdom has begun. View B is especially attractive to those who ignore or do not believe the many Old Testament prophecies. To them the parables describe mostly a “spiritual” kingdom, not just a delay. That view (in fact, both views) can be tested in what Jesus and His disciples said later. As just pointed out, the disciples certainly understood the parables. Therefore, if He really changed the kingdom’s meaning or affirmed that it started, that will show up later in Mark.

In “Conclusions” we will consider why Jesus hid from most people this “postponement” of the kingdom.

Mark 5:41 Then, gently taking the child by the hand, he said to her, "Talitha koum," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up." 5:42 The girl got up at once and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). They were completely astonished at this. 5:43 He strictly ordered that no one should know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

This is one of many samples of Jesus' power by which He could have brought the kingdom described by Old Testament prophets. This one shows His ultimate power over death. Surely, such material miracles could not be evidence that the kingdom came in a spiritual form or will be strictly spiritual!

Mark 6:7 Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two. He gave them authority over the unclean spirits.... 6:12 So they went out and preached that all should repent. 6:13 They cast out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Not only did Jesus have the power to bring the kingdom; He also imparted that power to His apostles. This continuing abundance of miracles was continuing evidence that the kingdom was near. Matthew 10:7, in a parallel passage, emphasizes its nearness. But as long as it was merely near, it had not begun.

Mark 6:27 So the king sent an executioner at once to bring John's head, and he went and beheaded John in prison.

If Jesus let His herald come to such an unjust end, where was Jesus' messianic authority? The best explanation is that the time for judgment and ruling had not yet arrived.

Mark 7:24 After Jesus left there, he went to the region of Tyre. When he went into a house, he did not want anyone to know, but he was not able to escape notice.

What a strange kingdom this would have been, with the King withdrawing from His home territory! (He kept on doing so.) Of course, those who think He had already inaugurated a spiritual kingdom feel free to redefine virtually everything about it.

Mark 8:27 Then Jesus and his disciples went to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" 8:28 They said, "John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets." 8:29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." 8:30 Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. 8:31 Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 8:32 He spoke openly about this....

SEE Matthew 16:13-20. Through Peter Jesus' disciples made this Great Confession, that He is the Anointed One (the meaning of *Christ/Messiah*). As I explained for chapter 1, this means the expected King. The parallel in Luke 9:20 has "the Christ of God." The

parallel in Matthew 16:16 adds *Son*: “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” As previously explained, “Son of God” does not indicate deity but heirship. It simply looks at *Christ/Messiah* from another angle. If it meant something different from *Christ*, such as, deity, we could not explain why Mark and Luke left it out!

Their confession was exactly right, as all the Gospels imply and Matthew emphasizes. But the King did not immediately assure them of glory around the corner. Instead, (a) He forbade their confessing publicly who He is, probably for the same reason that He forbade demons. Then (b) He began to predict His own suffering, which He reiterated in each of the next chapters.

Mark 8:38 For if anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” 9:1 And he said to them, “I tell you the truth, there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.”

See Luke 9:26-27. Here the Lord twice referred to His future glory. First, He warned those who must follow Him to death not to be ashamed of Him. Else He would disown them when He comes in glory accompanied by angels. Second, He promised that some of His present disciples would soon “see the kingdom...come with power.” The only event fitting that promise was His Transfiguration a week later before three of His disciples. Years later, just before his death, Peter referred to that event. He assured believers that the Lord’s glorious return is no fable; on the mountain they were eyewitnesses of His future glory. In other words, they saw a preview of His coming glorious kingdom.

2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly concocted fables when we made known to you the power and return of our Lord Jesus Christ; no, we were eyewitnesses of his grandeur. 1:17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father, when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory: “This is my dear Son, in whom I am delighted.” 1:18 When this voice was conveyed from heaven, we ourselves heard it, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

Mark 9:11 Then they asked him, “Why do the experts in the law say that Elijah must come first?” 9:12 He said to them, “Elijah does indeed come first, and restores all things. And why is it written that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be despised? 9:13 But I tell you that Elijah has certainly come, and they did to him whatever they wanted, just as it is written about him.”

The disciples’ question was triggered by what they had seen “on the holy mountain.” Not only had Jesus been “transfigured” in a preview of His “power and return;” Elijah had been there too, along with Moses. Well, like all godly Jews (then and now), the disciples knew a famous prophecy about Elijah. The prophet Malachi’s last prediction was that Elijah would come before the Day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5-6). What about that prophecy? Jesus explained that Elijah had indeed come (in John the Baptist)—so

everything seemed ready for the kingdom. But like all the Old Testament prophets, Malachi did not understand that Messiah Himself would come twice. So he did not predict two comings for “Elijah” either. We are still waiting for the second.

Mark 9:33 Then they came to Capernaum. After Jesus was inside the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 9:34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 9:35 After he sat down, he called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

Like most discussions recorded from the last months of the Lord’s ministry, this one had to do with the coming kingdom. Although Mark does not always make a point of that relationship to the kingdom, Matthew does (e.g., Matt. 19:12). On this occasion Matthew records, “At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’” (Matt. 18:1). The next verses in Matthew 18 make it obvious that entering the kingdom was still future.¹⁶

In fact, the kingdom was clearly future in nearly every mention after the Great Confession. SEE Luke 17:20-21. Even there the Lord said that “the kingdom of God is in your midst” only because He, the King, was present.

Mark 9:43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter into life crippled than to have two hands and go into hell, to the unquenchable fire. 9:45 If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better to enter life lame than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 9:47 If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out! It is better to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell...

The Lord here used “to enter (into) life” with the same meaning as “to enter into the kingdom of God.” Those two expressions are used interchangeably again in 10:23-30. The time is unmistakable in the last verse there: “receive...in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:30). In fact, both expressions always refer to the future in the first three Gospels. So does entering hell, with one exception: the man in the parable in Luke 16 enters torment in Hades at death. Thus, one of the two roads mentioned in Matthew 7:13, 14 leads to “life.” The other leads to “destruction.” They will be awarded on “that day” of final judgment (Matt. 7:21-22; cf. 25:46). Don’t miss the meaning of this for the kingdom. Entering the kingdom will be the same as entering or receiving (eternal) life. That is the usual meaning of eternal life in the first three Gospels, and sometimes in the fourth.

Mark 10:14 "...Let the little children come to me and do not try to stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 10:15 I tell you the truth, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

SEE Matthew 18:1-4. Verses before and after these speak of the kingdom of God as future. So why does the Lord here speak about it as present (it "belongs" to the child-like; men must "receive" it)? Because we often speak of a great future hope as though it were present. For example, our Lord spoke that way of the future resurrection. The Greek of Luke 20:35-36 (also Matthew 22:30 and Mark 12:25) uses several present tense verbs to refer to those future conditions. But it is not confusing to speak of the future as though it were present when we know that it is future. In fact, God has already granted us the future, and we have received it. "For everything belongs to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future. Everything belongs to you..." (1 Cor. 3:21-22). Even the future kingdom belongs to us already!

*Mark 10:17 ..."Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"...10:23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" 10:24 The disciples were astonished at these words. But again Jesus said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 10:25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." 10:26 They were even more astonished and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?"...
10:28 Peter began to speak to him, "Look, we have left everything to follow you!" 10:29 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, there is no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel 10:30 who will not receive in this age a hundred times as much – homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields, all with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life."*

SEE Matthew 16:27. This passage uses interchangeably the following expressions: "to inherit [or, receive] eternal life," "to enter the kingdom of God," and "to be saved." They all mean the same—and to achieve them is an "impossible" task for a rich man. The final verse here (Mark 10:30) and Matthew 19:29 show that this "eternal life" will be given "in the age to come" (so not yet). In his parallel passage Matthew adds more about that future. The Lord called it "the age when all things are renewed, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne" and the apostles "will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). That is clearly a future glorious kingdom.

Mark 11:7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. 11:8 Many spread their cloaks on the road and others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 11:9 Both those who went ahead and those who followed kept shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who

comes in the name of the Lord! *11:10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!*"

SEE Matthew 21:1-11. All four Gospels describe this monumental event in which Jesus offered Himself to Israel as Messiah/King. Although His disciples had so confessed Him in private, He had not let them confess it publicly. But now He Himself deliberately fulfilled Zechariah 9:9, as quoted in Matthew 21:4-5:

This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:

*"Tell the people of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
unassuming and seated on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

Those with Jesus understood what Jesus meant by doing this. Both Mark and Matthew note that the crowd extolled Him as the "Coming One" (the King) and anticipated "the coming kingdom of...David." They knew the kingdom was still "coming" and had not begun yet. But now He had fulfilled Zechariah's verse about the King's coming. So they naturally expected the next verse of the same prophecy to be fulfilled, too. It said in part, "Then he will announce peace to the nations. His dominion will be from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9:10b). Why did that not take place? Because it still awaits the King's Second Coming, which had not been revealed to Zechariah. In other words, there is a time gap between Zechariah 9:9 and 9:10. Some insist, however, that He did start His kingdom—and that it is "spiritual." If so, you would think that this was a good occasion to say so.

Mark 11:13 After noticing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he went to see if he could find any fruit on it. When he came to it he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 11:14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it....

11:20 In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. 11:21 Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered."

This incident does not bear directly on whether the kingdom started or not—but may affect its character. It seems strange that the Lord did not say what the cursed fig tree represented. Most likely it was the leadership of Israel, who struggled with Jesus in the next episodes. Some interpret it to mean the whole nation, even denying Israel a spiritual future. However, Romans 11 agrees with many Old Testament passages that God will restore that nation. See my survey of Romans.

Mark 11:15 Then they came to Jerusalem. Jesus entered the temple area and began to drive out those who were selling and buying in the temple courts. He turned over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, 11:16 and he would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 11:17 Then he began to teach them and said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have turned it into a den of robbers!"

For a few days Jesus converted the temple into the "house of prayer for all nations" as it was pictured in prophecies (Isa. 56:7). That would favor the literal interpretation of other Old Testament prophecies. Since the resurrection itself will be material, there will be a material world and material buildings. It is true that temple terminology is applied to the church in Ephesians 2:19-22 and elsewhere. But that does not imply that the plain meaning of temple predictions has been superseded. Why should it? Plain prophecies can have both literal fulfillments and spiritual applications. Notice an example from Romans (see my survey).

In Romans 9:25-29 Paul shows that Scriptures foretold Jewish unbelief and the salvation of Gentiles. He begins by quoting (in vv. 25 and 26) two passages from Hosea *that really pertain to Israel*. They say that those who were not God's people would later become His people. The words are equally true about Gentiles and are so applied here (see 1 Peter 2:10).¹⁷

Mark 12:1 Then he began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a pit for its winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went on a journey. 12:2 At harvest time he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his portion of the crop.... 12:6 He had one left, his one dear son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 12:7 But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours!' 12:8 So they seized him, killed him, and threw his body out of the vineyard. 12:9 What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 12:10 Have you not read this scripture: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. 12:11 This is from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" 12:12 Now they wanted to arrest him (but they feared the crowd), because they realized that he told this parable against them. So they left him and went away.

After carefully creating this vineyard, the owner "leased it to tenant farmers" (12:1), who were obligated to send him "his portion of the crop" (v. 2). Instead, they withheld his portions and eventually killed his son and heir (vv. 7-8). Therefore, the vineyard would be given to other caretakers. Mark and the parallel passage in Matthew both identify the "tenant farmers" as the leaders of Israel. Mark says they "feared the crowd" (v. 12). Matthew also identifies the vineyard: "For this reason I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matt. 21:43). So

in some sense the vineyard continuously tended for many years represented the kingdom.

However, God's kingdom on earth was not always in operation. It began at Mt. Sinai (Ps. 114:1-2) but was suspended when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (Hos. 3:4). And it certainly did not start again before Jesus came, if then. So what did the vineyard represent when the kingdom was not operating? God's kingdom program, the development that will result in the final kingdom. That is what was taken away from the leaders of Israel. That program is now in the hands of others but will eventually be restored to Israel. The time for restoring it was the question in Acts 1:6. SEE Matthew 21:43.

*Mark 12:18 Sadducees (who say there is **no resurrection**) also came to him and asked him,... 12:23 "In the **resurrection**, when they **rise again**, whose wife will she be? For all seven had married her." 12:24 Jesus said to them, "Aren't you deceived for this reason, because you don't know the scriptures or the power of God? 12:25 For when they **rise from the dead**, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 12:26 Now as for the **dead being raised**, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 12:27 He is not the God of the dead but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"*

SEE Matthew 5:3-12. Look again at the words I have bolded. The issue here was not immortality but bodily resurrection. God "alone possesses immortality" (1 Tim. 6:16), which means that only He *by nature* survives forever.¹⁸ The Sadducees had not asked about immortality but about "the resurrection, when they rise again." Their question was not sincere but designed to confuse and discredit Jesus. They did not believe in bodily resurrection, because it would create difficulties for which they could not imagine the solution. Though they had less confidence in other Bible books, they thought they believed the Pentateuch. Instead, as Jesus showed in His response, they really didn't believe Genesis or Exodus either. Many who are called Christians nowadays have the same attitude toward the kingdom God promised in those and other books. They consider a renewed earth populated with people who eat and drink an unworthy Jewish concept.

To repeat, the Sadducees' question was not merely about survival but about resurrection. Jesus' answer concerned "when they rise from the dead....the dead being raised." What was His proof that God will bodily raise some? Simply that centuries after the patriarchs' death, God was not through with them: "He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Why does that require their resurrection? Because He still intends to fulfill the promises He gave them (Heb. 11:13). They must have bodies, for example, in order to inherit the Promised Land in the coming kingdom.

Mark 12:34 When Jesus saw that he had answered thoughtfully, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Once again, the language could refer to a present kingdom but probably speaks instead of the future as though present. See my comments for 10:14. In 14:25 Jesus still looks forward to the kingdom as future.

Mark 12:35 While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he said, "How is it that the experts in the law say that the Christ is David's son? 12:36 David himself, by the Holy Spirit, said, 'The Lord said to my lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet."' 12:37 If David himself calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"

SEE Matthew 22:41-46. With this question Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1 and brought an end to His debate with the Jewish leaders in the temple. He apparently wanted to show that Messiah must be more than David's son, since David called Him "Lord." Our main interest now is the temporary position the psalm predicted for Messiah. He is there now, sitting at God's right hand in heaven until His enemies are put down. See my discussion in Appendix C. This verse is quoted five times in the New Testament. Hebrews 10:12-13 also comments, using the same words. All these passages agree that Messiah is waiting now. He waits until He can come and reign from His own throne on earth, which is David's throne (Luke 1:32-33). God's throne in heaven is never called David's throne (Rev. 3:21). From Acts 3:19-21 we can deduce one main condition for Jesus' return: At least many of the nation of Israel will repent first. Then He will come, bring "times of refreshing," and restore all things (cf. Matt. 19:28-29).

Some think that Ephesians 1:20-22 pictures Jesus as reigning now. But that passage refers to His authority—even over future things—more than His present activity. It even quotes Psalm 8:6, that God "put all things under his [man's] control." But that verse is not yet fulfilled; so says Hebrews 2:8 when it quotes it.

Mark 13:8 ...These are but the beginning of birth pains.... 13:13...But the one who endures to the end will be saved.... 13:24 But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; 13:25 the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 13:26 Then everyone will see the Son of Man arriving in the clouds with great power and glory. 13:27 Then he will send angels and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

"Birth pains" imply the birth of a new world. This passage relates the new world to the Son of Man's coming from heaven in power and glory, in order to reign. We are still waiting for that coming and the gathering of the elect. Notice that it will take place after the unequalled "tribulation" (vv. 19, 24).

Mark 13:29 So also you, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, right at the door. 13:30 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

“These things” (in the previous verses) will indicate “that he is near.” The parallel passage in Luke (21:31, which SEE) says the same thing but “that the kingdom of God is near.” For present purposes it is enough to notice that nothing in this prophetic discourse took place before Pentecost. So the kingdom was not near at that time.

Mark 13:35 Stay alert, then, because you do not know when the owner of the house will return – whether during evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn – 13:36 or else he might find you asleep when he returns suddenly. 13:37 What I say to you I say to everyone: Stay alert!

Here the Lord exhorted His followers to stay alert because He could come at any time to begin His kingdom. Whenever the same exhortation and conditions are repeated in the Epistles (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:6-8; Rev. 16:15), we should assume that the kingdom is future there, too.

JESUS CRUCIFIED

Mark 14:24 He said to them, “This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, that is poured out for many. 14:25 I tell you the truth, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

“The blood of the covenant” is a phrase from Exodus 24:8. There it referred to the blood of animals ratifying the “first” covenant, made at Sinai. Here it refers to Jesus’ blood (symbolized by the wine) that would ratify the new covenant. The new covenant will be eternal, like His kingdom, which was still future here in Mark 14:25.

Mark 14:61 But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest questioned him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” 14:62 “I am,” said Jesus, “and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” 14:63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? 14:64 You have heard the blasphemy! What is your verdict?” They all condemned him as deserving death.

Here Jesus was sentenced to die because He claimed to be Messiah, who will come to rule. As usual in Mark, “Son [of God]” is virtually a synonym of Messiah. He is the royal heir, as in Psalm 2. SEE Mark 1:9-11 and comments there. Also SEE Matthew 3:16-17.

15:2 So Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He replied, “You say so.”...

15:9 So Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to release the king of the Jews for you?"...

15:12 So Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you want me to do with the one you call king of the Jews?"...

15:17 They put a purple cloak on him and after braiding a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 15:18 They began to salute him: "Hail, king of the Jews!"...

15:26 The inscription of the charge against him read, "The king of the Jews."...

15:31 In the same way even the chief priests – together with the experts in the law – were mocking him among themselves: "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! 15:32 Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, that we may see and believe!"...

15:39 Now when the centurion, who stood in front of him, saw how he died, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Nearly all these passages affirm that Jesus' "crime" was His claim to be Messiah/King. For the synonymous title "God's Son," see my comments on 1:9-11 and 14:61-64.

15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, a highly regarded member of the council, who was himself looking forward to the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Once again, this verse agrees that the kingdom was still future. SEE John 3:1-10.

JESUS RAISED, SEEN, WITNESSED TO, BELIEVED ON

[[16:9 Early on the first day of the week, after he arose, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had driven out seven demons. 16:10 She went out and told those who were with him, while they were mourning and weeping. 16:11 And when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.

16:12 After this he appeared in a different form to two of them while they were on their way to the country. 16:13 They went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. 16:14 Then he appeared to the eleven themselves, while they were eating, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen him resurrected. 16:15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16:16 The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned."¹⁹

There is lots of evidence that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to many disciples on various occasions during forty days. No one, of course, managed to disprove that claim by producing His dead body. His Great Commission included here is found in some form in every Gospel and Acts. His disciples were so convinced of His triumph that they gave witness at the risk of their own lives. All those who believe the gospel become transformed. They repent just as the Thessalonians did who "turned to God

from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath” (1 Thess. 1:9b-10).

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Gospel of Luke

Bible quotations are mostly from the NIV 1984. References beginning "SEE..." are to my comments elsewhere in these substudies, usually Matthew.

The introduction to this substudy is adapted from my "What Kingdom of God Did Jesus Proclaim in Luke?" That study deals with thirty-six passages in Luke. But here the list of texts under "Passages Relating to the Kingdom" will mostly be supplementary to those considered for Matthew and Mark.

Introduction

"Kingdom of God" common in Luke. Surely every person who loves what is good and right must welcome the idea of a kingdom of God. What an improvement that would be over the governments we have now! The kingdom of God is a key theme in the Gospel of Luke. At least thirty-six passages refer to it, some of them repeatedly. It was the basic theme of Jesus' ministry. He called it by different names, including "the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1), "my kingdom" (22:30), "a great banquet" (14:16), and "that age" (20:35). Often He spoke of it without labeling it. Even Jesus' title *Christ* (literally, *Anointed One*, like *Messiah*) means primarily that He will rule in God's kingdom; He is "Christ, a king" (23:2).

God's Old Testament kingdom to be restored. The story in Luke continues the story begun in the Old Testament. There, too, the theme was the kingdom of God. There can be no doubt what kind of kingdom that was. All the Old Testament books of history (Genesis through Esther) tell about it and its sequel. Genesis lays the foundation for that kingdom. Exodus recounts its beginning when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt. They were already His chosen people, but at Mount Sinai He made them into His kingdom (Exod. 19:3-6; 25:22; Ps. 114:1-2). Second Kings (chapters 17 and 25) and 2 Chronicles show how God brought that kingdom to an end. This followed several centuries of warnings through the prophets (like Isaiah and Jeremiah). Through the same prophets God often promised that He would some day restore the kingdom perfected and glorious (Micah 4:8). Read one such promise out of many in the book of Isaiah.²⁰

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples....On this mountain...he will swallow up death forever [and] wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 25:6-8)

A great feast prepared by the Lord for all peoples on earth! No more death nor tears! No more disgrace for the Lord's people Israel! There are many such prophecies. Because of them, godly

Jews in Jesus' day expected the coming kingdom of God to have material and political elements. Sure, it would be spiritual: God's Spirit would fill the Ruler and indwell every person. All would know and serve God. But the kingdom would also be earthly—over all the earth—with Israel restored and all nations in subjection to God. And it would be material. All effects of the curse—sin, suffering, sickness, and death—would be replaced with righteousness, wholeness, peace, and joy. In a new covenant the Lord would fulfill all His promises—even those of the land and the throne—to Abraham and David. “The earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

Is it naïve to take such promises at face value? Would it be “unspiritual” for God to include such material and political elements in the kingdom He brings?²¹ Was the kingdom preached by Jesus identical to the predicted one? If so, why did it not come as described? Did it come in some form? These are all questions that one must decide if he is to understand Luke's Gospel.

Lots of evidence. There is no lack of evidence to consider. Yet, interpreters disagree. Some of them do not know or do not believe the Old Testament promises. Some of them get their definitions from current Christian culture rather than from Bible study. Some of them use one or two verses (which they misinterpret) to contradict all the rest. For these reasons many have wrongly concluded (1) that Jesus' kingdom is quite non-political and non-material (SEE comments on Luke 17:21) and/or (2) that He has already inaugurated it.

This study shows that the kingdom preached in Luke is identical to the predicted one—and will be inaugurated at Jesus' Second Coming. Nearly all the Luke passages, when translated properly, allege or agree with its futurity. A very few, such as, 16:16 and 17:21, definitely speak of it as present in a special sense.

Luke: Passages Relating to the Kingdom

Luke chapters 1-2. Please take time to read these two chapters, designed to provide the proper background for this Gospel. They clearly present the Jewish concept of the kingdom, which came mostly from Old Testament Scriptures. Pause also to read such passages as Isaiah 2:1-4; 65:17-19, 25; and Zechariah 2:10-13; 14:1-4, 8-9, 16-21. A normal interpretation of such prophecies leads to the same view we see in Luke 1-2. That view was stated by the angel Gabriel and by Spirit-filled Jews such as Zechariah. It included political elements, such as an earthly throne for the king, freedom for Israel, and obedient nations. These speakers were surely not misguided. Neither did Jesus contradict what they said; rather, He assumed it and even reinforced it. Therefore, the Jewish view of the kingdom as seen in Luke 1-2 provides the proper background for this subject in the rest of the book. Rejecting their view has brought confusion.

Luke 1:26-33. The angel Gabriel told the virgin Mary that by God's Spirit she would bear a Son for the royal house of David. Therefore, He would not only be David's Son but "will be called the Son of the Most High." He will sit on David's throne, over the house of Jacob (the nation of Israel), and reign forever.

Luke 1:67-75. Zechariah, on the occasion of naming his own son, was "filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied" (v. 67). Pay special attention to items I have bolded. He gave praise that God⁶⁹ "has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David⁷⁰ (**as he said through his holy prophets** of long ago),⁷¹ **salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us**—⁷² to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham:⁷⁴ **to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear**⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." Notice that God was fulfilling earlier Scriptures given by "His holy prophets." The result (the kingdom) would combine spiritual and material elements. We must not disdain this Spirit-inspired description of the kingdom.

Luke 3:16. "He will baptize you with [in] the Holy Spirit and with fire." SEE Matthew 3:11.

Luke 4:41. "Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the **Son of God!**' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the **Christ.**" Here the bolded royal titles are treated as equivalents. SEE Matthew 3:16-17.

Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2, 11, 60; 20:1. Jesus and His disciples preached the (good news of the) kingdom. The fact that they did not define the kingdom implies that the Jews would understand it as they did in chapters 1-2. SEE Matthew 3:2.

Luke 7:28. Up to John, none was greater than John; yet, the least in the kingdom is greater. When Jesus said this, John was still alive and in prison. But Jesus did not imply that John was unqualified and had missed the kingdom. Instead, the kingdom had not started, though He spoke about it in the present tense. When it does start, everyone in it (even John) will be greater than anyone before.

Luke 8:9-10. By teaching in parables and explaining to His disciples, Jesus revealed the secrets of the kingdom to them only. These secrets centered around a relatively insignificant time of sowing leading to a great final harvest. Jesus' disciples saw the kingdom in the harvest. This all meant that from a human point of view the kingdom was being postponed. SEE Matthew chapter 13.

Luke 9:26-27. “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

SEE Mark 8:38 to 9:1. Here Jesus promised that before their death **some** of His close disciples would see the kingdom and His glory. First, consider what this could *not* mean:

- Not Jesus’ resurrection or Pentecost, which all of them saw, whereas the promise was only for some of them.
- Not heaven, because this would happen before their death.
- Not God's universal kingdom, because everybody is in that.
- Not a supposed spiritual kingdom, because all believers would be in that.

The only time some of them (in fact, three) saw the kingdom was the preview at the Mount of Transfiguration. All three Synoptic Gospels make that connection by putting it next after Jesus’ promise. Peter later emphasized that connection in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

Luke 9:62. “Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is **fit** for service **in the kingdom** of God.’” When so translated, this verse is one of the very few in Luke that look at the kingdom as present. But the Greek for the bolded words (*euthetos te basileia*) simply means “fit for (or in) the kingdom.” There are no Greek words here representing “for service;” that was supplied. Therefore, the English Standard Version is more likely: “Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is **fit for the kingdom of God.**’” The New American Standard Bible and King James Bible end with the same bolded words. With this preferable translation, the time for the kingdom is ambiguous.

Luke 10:1-12. This passage describes the Lord’s main concern on this final journey to Jerusalem. He commissioned seventy-two messengers “to every town and place where he was about to go.” They all used miraculous powers (v. 8) and gave the same message. In each place, whether welcomed or not, they were to preach that “the kingdom of God is near” (vv. 9, 11). As usual, “near” did not mean present but close. SEE Matthew 3:2.

Luke 11:20. The kingdom “has come to [upon] you.” It had touched earth in Messiah and His power. As long as the Lord’s message through the seventy-two was the kingdom’s nearness (10:9, 11), it had not been established. SEE Matthew 12:25-29.

Luke 12:31-32. Disciples should seek the kingdom. This is contrasted with seeking what they will eat or drink (v. 29, using the same Greek verb). The Father is pleased to give them this kingdom.

Luke 13:18-21. Parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. Jesus’ Jewish disciples would rightly see the kingdom not in the small beginning but in the grand conclusion. Some inter-

preters consider the growth in these two parables as ominous, not healthy. But the context in Luke 13 highly favors the view that they are encouraging. SEE Matthew 13 and Mark 4:26-34.

Luke 13:23-30. When asked if only a few will be saved, Jesus equated that with entering the kingdom. Many who knew Him will try to get into the kingdom (and feast with Abraham, etc.) but not be admitted. Cf. Matt. 7:21-23.

Luke 14:15-24. Someone spoke of the blessedness of eating in the kingdom. Jesus responded that “at the time of the banquet” the invited ones were told that “everything is now ready. But they all alike began to make excuses” and refused to attend. So “the men who were invited” would not be allowed into the banquet. But the “poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame” would be brought in, as would those on “the roads and country lanes.” This meant that religious Israel in Jesus’ day rejected the kingdom and would be excluded; others would take their place.

Luke 16:16. Since the time of John, the kingdom is being preached and “everyone is forcing his way into it.” A better translation is “everyone is doing it violence.” SEE Matthew 11:12,²² the parallel passage, where NASB correctly translates the noun form of this verb as “violent men.” The noun is never used elsewhere of good men. Rightly translated, Luke 16:16 is true to the facts: People in general (“everyone”) were *not* entering the kingdom but trying to use it for their own selfish purposes. They were doing violence to its representatives—John, Jesus, and Jesus’ apostles.

Luke 17:20-37. This records a question by the Pharisees and two answers by Jesus. The Pharisees asked “when the kingdom of God would come” (17:20). Why did they ask this? Because of what the Lord’s heralds were preaching in “every town and place where he himself was about to go” (Luke 10:1). He had made them announce that “the kingdom of God has drawn near” (10:9, 11, Greek). Not that it had started, which would have triggered a different question: “Where is it?”

Jesus’ response to their “when” question was in two parts:

- First, He told the Pharisees that the kingdom’s coming was not a process but depended on the King’s presence (17:21). It was already in their midst when He was there (not “within” them, as some translate).
- Second, He told His disciples that there will be no doubt “on the day the Son of Man is revealed” (that is, when He comes in the glory of His kingdom). It “will be just like the lightning....” But first He must suffer, His disciples will keep wishing for Him, and many others will grow complacent (17:22-35).

In the first part the NIV includes these words: “the kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation...because **the kingdom of God is within you.**” Many misuse the bolded clause to prove a present “spiritual” kingdom. But here are reasons it cannot mean that.

- As long as the constant message was that the kingdom was near (10:9, 11), it would be contradictory to say it had started.
- To deny its coming with “careful observation” does not imply any unseen process. The same terms are used of noting the advance of an army or the stages of a disease.
- The Greek for “within you” is better translated “in your midst” (NASB). This would refer to the kingdom’s presence in the King Himself (11:10). It was in their midst when He was here before—and will be in our midst when He returns.
- The Lord’s answer to His disciples made the kingdom only future. He warned them of (a) a long delay while He would be absent (v. 22), (b) deceivers claiming He has arrived (v. 23), (c) His sudden, unexpected, and unmistakable return (vv. 24, 26-30), and (d) the final separation He will make (vv. 31-35).

Luke 19:11-27. SEE Matthew 3:2 and Mark 1:14. Jesus and His entourage were completing their slow, deliberate, final journey toward Jerusalem. We must not forget their constant and widespread message during those months: “The kingdom of God has drawn near” (SEE 10:1-12). But at this last stage before Jerusalem, Jesus told the parable of Luke 19:11-27 to prepare His disciples for a change: The kingdom would no longer be near. Jesus now told them, in effect,

- When we reach Jerusalem, the kingdom will not appear, as many think. Instead, I will go far away to get it.
- Until I come back with the kingdom, I will leave you on earth to invest faithfully for me and the kingdom.

This certainly reinforced what the disciples had understood earlier from the “secrets” (SEE Matthew chapter 13). The kingdom will be delayed until Jesus’ Second Coming. From here to the end of Luke, it is no longer referred to as near but only as future.

ARE YOU WAITING FOR HIM TO COME AND RULE? ARE YOU FAITHFULLY WORKING FOR HIM AND HIS COMING KINGDOM?

Luke 21. SEE Matthew 24-25. “Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near” (21:31). Nothing in this prophetic discourse took place before Pentecost. So the kingdom was not near at that time.

Luke 22:16-18. Jesus will not partake of the bread and wine again until the kingdom of God comes.

Luke 22:20. Jesus identifies His death (“this cup”) as the basis for the eternal new covenant. SEE Matthew 26:28.

Luke 22:29-30. Jesus confers the kingdom on the apostles, so that they may eat with Him in His kingdom and rule over the twelve tribes of Israel. “Israel” always refers to physical descendants of Abraham.

Luke 23:42. The criminal on his cross asked Jesus to remember him when He comes in His kingdom.

Luke 23:50-51. Joseph of Arimathea was “a member of the Council,” like Nicodemus (John 3:1). Both of them were “waiting for the kingdom of God,” which must have had the usual Jewish meaning learned from the prophecies. As usual, the divine record does not correct that meaning.

Luke 24:13-32. Luke records what the Lord did in three of His appearances after He rose again—and what He said in two of those. In this first record He walked with two disciples who “were going to a village called Emmaus” (24:13). They “had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (24:21). That was the same expectation godly, Spirit-filled Zechariah had in the beginning; SEE 1:67-79. Notice how Jesus proceeded to affirm Old Testament Scriptures. Just as the predictions of His suffering were fulfilled as written, so will be fulfilled the predictions of the glory of His kingdom.

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe **all that the prophets have spoken!** Did not the Christ [Messiah] have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (24:25-27)

Luke 24:33-49. In this second appearance reported in any detail by Luke, Jesus met with “the Eleven and those with them” (24:33). After proving that He had risen with a body, He continued the same lessons as in the previous incident:

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms [that is, all the Old Testament books].” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (24:44-45)

Notice carefully that “he **opened their minds so they could understand** the Scriptures.” So they were not misled or naïve when they later “asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’” (Acts 1:6). The kingdom will indeed be restored to Israel, just as Old Testament prophecies had said.

DO YOU ALSO STUDY ALL PARTS OF THE SCRIPTURES? DO YOU PRAY FOR HIM TO OPEN YOUR MIND TO UNDERSTAND THEM?

Gospel of John

Bible quotations are from the NIV 1984.

The kingdom is mentioned by name in only two passages in this Gospel, twice in John 3 (vv. 3 and 5) and three times in 18:36. In all of these it is spoken of in the present tense although it is clearly future. My comments are adapted from my survey: “The Gospel of John: Messiah’s Signs & Men’s Responses.”

John: Passages Relating to the Kingdom

John 3:1-10

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

3 In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can **see the kingdom of God** unless he is born again.”

4 “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

5 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can **enter the kingdom of God** unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’

8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?”

Just like Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus was “a member of the Council” and “waiting for the kingdom of God” (Luke 23:50-51). For both of them the kingdom had the usual Jewish meaning learned from the prophecies. John 3 does not correct that meaning any more than Luke 23 did. So we should not assume that it had changed to mean a present, spiritual kingdom. What Jesus did correct was Nicodemus’s notion that he was ready for the promised kingdom. Although a Jewish leader and teacher, he had to be born again.

Nicodemus should have known about the birth from above. “You are Israel’s teacher...and do you not understand these things?” (3:10). Why should he already know? Because in the Old Testament Scriptures God had repeatedly promised that change in connection with the

coming kingdom. For example, consider Deuteronomy 30:1-10, which told what God would do after He dispersed Israel “among the nations” (v. 1). He would “restore your fortunes... gather you again...bring you to the land...make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers” (vv. 3-5; see also v. 9). On what basis could God admit them into the restored kingdom? The rebirth from above: “The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live” (v. 6).

Ezekiel 36:28-30 and 33-38 gives a similar description of the future kingdom. Israel’s land will “become like the garden of Eden” (v. 35). The LORD “will make [Israel’s] people as numerous as sheep” (v. 37). Other nations “will know that I the LORD have rebuilt” (v. 36). Notice again the basis for admitting Israel to that predicted kingdom: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean...and put My Spirit in you” and “give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you” (Ezek. 36:25-27).²³ Thus, Ezekiel 36 describes the kingdom Nicodemus was waiting for—and mentions the same elements Jesus talked about: the water, the Spirit, and the new life. Nicodemus should not have expected the kingdom without the rebirth by the Spirit.

It is evident that we are still waiting for the kingdom the prophets described and Nicodemus expected. That is the same kingdom we seek and pray for. In order to see it and enter it, we must be born again. But since it is still future, *we should not say* we are “born into the kingdom.” That is a misleading expression, never used in the Bible.²⁴

John 18:33-38

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

34 “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

36 Jesus said, “**My kingdom** is not of [Greek *ek*, from] this world. If it were [Greek, if **my kingdom** were from this world], my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now **my kingdom** is from another place.”

37 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

38 “What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.

Only John gives us certain details of Pilate's interrogation and Jesus' responses (18:33-38 and 19:8-11). The issue, repeatedly mentioned, was Jesus' claim to be "king of the Jews" (18:33; cf. Luke 23:2). The final argument by the Jews was "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (19:12). In his masterful commentary, Alva McClain says

There are some interpreters who argue that this charge was a *total* misrepresentation of the true nature of the Messianic Kingdom, and that our Lord's answer to Pilate proves that His Kingdom was wholly a "spiritual" matter, having no political or material implications whatsoever. It is passing strange that men have not seen the utter folly of trying to erect an adequate definition of our Lord's Kingdom based in large part on a brief conversation between Him and a cynical Roman governor who knew nothing about the Kingdom of God, and cared less.²⁵

What follows are Pilate's three "questions" and Jesus' three responses. For the meanings of the responses, I have quoted from, or summarized, McClain on pages 380-382. (The footnotes are mine.)

Question 1: Are you the king of the Jews? (18:33)

Response: Jesus' response (v. 34) intended "to clarify the exact meaning of Pilate's inquiry so that it could be answered intelligibly. If the source of the charge was Pilate, then it would be entirely *political* and nothing more. In that case the Lord's answer would be, No, I am not a king in that narrow sense of the term." However, if Pilate asked from the Jewish standpoint, Jesus would not deny His Messianic rights.

Question 2: "Am I a Jew?...It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" (18:35)

Response: "The way is cleared for our Lord's reply to the original question. The first part of his reply is wholly negative: 'My kingdom is not of this world' (vs. 36).²⁶ The preposition is *ek*, indicating source or originating cause.²⁷ His kingdom does not originate in the present cosmos or world system." If it did, His servants would fight. "This was something that Pilate could understand: a 'king' with no military support, and who actually had to be protected from physical violence on the part of his own subjects, could give no possible concern to the politically realistic Pilate."

Question 3 (NIV interprets it as an ironic exclamation): "You are a king, then!" (18:37)

Response: "You are right in saying I am a king." Jesus underlines this as being "truth."

To this, Pilate has no answer, except to drop his cynical "What is truth" (vs. 38) as he left the hall of judgment, tragically unaware that he had been in the presence of the King, who is the God of all truth.

Now to deduce from this brief exchange between Pilate and Jesus the sweeping proposition that the Messianic Kingdom is exclusively a kingdom of love and truth, which will never employ force in dealing with sinful men upon earth, is certainly theological conjecture at its worst. The Old Testament prophets had agreed that Messiah would

rule over the nations “with a rod of iron” (Ps. 2:9), and this was confirmed by the King Himself in the days of His flesh (Luke 19:14, 27); but the force used will be that of divine omnipotence, not the force of human armies.

Conclusions

A. The Gospels are squarely built on the Old Testament.

1. The first verse of the New Testament shows this dependence. It picks up the story line, meaningful names and royal titles, and reminders of divine covenants that must be fulfilled.
2. Fulfillments and applications of Old Testament Scriptures abound. These include literal fulfillments of predictions (some partial) and recapitulations of history.
3. The Old Testament told the kingdom's previous history and promised its future. It was well defined both in its earlier existence and in its future parameters. The latter include Messiah ruling from Jerusalem over all nations on earth; universal peace, justice, and holiness; Israel and Judah restored; and the end of the curse. It will be the same kingdom as before but perfected.

B. The predicted kingdom came near.

1. John the Baptist and Jesus constantly preached that it had drawn near. So did Jesus' apostles. This was also called "preaching the good news" or "preaching the kingdom." Luke emphasizes the fact that it remained near during the final deliberate journey to Jerusalem.
2. These preachers did not define the kingdom. Not because they wanted to mislead the hearers or keep them guessing but because the hearers understood. They already knew what the kingdom would be because earlier prophets had often described it. New Testament prophets, as in Luke 1 and 2, perfectly agreed. Nothing in the Gospels or elsewhere obliges us to redefine it in its basic meaning.
3. The fact that it drew near implies that it was distant before. Therefore, it could not be God's universal kingdom, which is always everywhere. A kingdom in the heart would always be present, too. But the kingdom suspended in the Old Testament had been distant and now drew near, apparently ready to be restored.
4. The kingdom's beginning in Exodus was re-enacted. Once again God did miracles to deliver Israel, brought them to a mountain, had them wash, and gave them His law.
5. Jesus' abundant miracles proved its nearness. They showed His full power to establish the kingdom by producing the predicted kinds of changes. Therefore, Hebrews 6:5 later called them "powers [that is, miracles] of the coming age."
6. Though near, the kingdom was still usually spoken of as future. Being near was not the same as being inaugurated. Most verses assume that it was still future. Some equate it with acquiring eternal life at the judgment. Of thirty-six passages in Luke that refer to the kingdom, only two or three definitely speak of it as present. I will explain those exceptions.
7. God brought the kingdom near for other cogent reasons than to establish it. We will consider those reasons—and some evidences that it did not start.

C. Though still future, the kingdom was sometimes spoken of as present or accessible.

1. To speak of it as present was exceptional. I just showed this for Luke; the same is true for Matthew. In Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus mostly uses future tense for the kingdom. But in the Beatitudes there, three out of nine references are in present.
2. To speak of it as present was usually not confusing, simply because they all knew what it is. They knew it was still future but near. It is common to think in present terms of a great future hope or event seen as near. That is the reason, for example, they also sometimes spoke of the future resurrection or future judgment as present.
3. In the King's person the kingdom "came on" them. It truly touched earth; it was even "in their midst" (Luke 17:21). Yet, the same passages clearly show it to be future (cf. Luke 17:22-35).
4. This proximity amounted to an offer of the kingdom. Since the King embodied the kingdom, Israel had a full opportunity to accept or reject them both. The way they treated Him was the way they treated His kingdom.
5. Since the kingdom was "in their midst," Israel could in effect violate it and "close" it. They did this by rejecting and opposing John, Jesus, and the Apostles. Thus they rejected the kingdom as offered and occasioned its "postponement." It was their fault that no one could enter it yet.

D. "Secrets of the kingdom" revealed its "postponement."

All three Synoptic Gospels show this sequence and meaning, although Matthew gives it great emphasis.

1. Jesus began revealing these "secrets" after it became evident that His people were rejecting Him. God, of course, always knew exactly what He planned to happen. But He did not tell it all to His prophets of old. It was like a picture puzzle. He gave them many bright pieces describing Messiah's glorious kingdom on earth. But He also gave them other pieces, some darker, that did not fit: Messiah's rejection, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. Sometimes He gave two pieces together that would later prove to be separate (like Zech. 9:9-10). The prophets struggled to put the puzzle together, to figure out the "time and circumstances" (1 Peter 1:10-12). But they could not do so. No one could until Jesus provided missing pieces. That is what He called "secrets of the kingdom"—previously unrevealed information.
2. These secrets prepared Jesus' disciples for an apparent change. Only disciples understood because He explained the parables only to them. The main revelation was that there would be a delay in the kingdom's coming. Messiah would not come just once but twice, bringing the kingdom at His second coming. That is when He will judge and rule. His kingdom will still be glorious and worldwide. Its people are being prepared in advance, from many nations. From man's perspective, but not God's, it has been postponed. Disciples need to know that.

3. This method did not enlighten unbelievers but hardened them more. Unable to understand these “secrets,” many who rejected Jesus became even less inclined to listen. Yet, the issue they faced remained the same. Uncomplicated. Would they believe God’s good news that the kingdom was near as concentrated in Jesus? Would they repent and follow Jesus so that God would prepare them? If they refused to humble themselves, Jesus’ words and actions would harden them even more.
4. Jesus’ “secrets” parables pictured the kingdom as their grand result. That was the way Jesus’ disciples, versed in Old Testament descriptions of the kingdom, must have interpreted them. His sample explanation of the Wheat and Tares parable agrees. It shows Jesus setting up the kingdom “at the end of the age.” Nothing required that it start immediately in a “spiritual” form. If it had, succeeding references to it would have sometimes distinguished its two alleged forms. That never happened.
5. Why did God wait so long to reveal these “secrets”? Why did He wait until Jesus’ rejection was inevitable, then revealed them only to a few? Above all, it gave men relative freedom to respond in faith or not. What if Israel had known beforehand that Messiah would come twice and that they must condemn Him and slay Him in His first coming? Then they might have refused to take part in that crime—or could at least partially justify their actions. For similar reasons, God’s whole process of revelation was little by little and in response to events.²⁸

E. Jesus predicted that He would build His kingdom assembly.

1. The occasion for this prediction was the Great Confession that Jesus is the King. Only Matthew 16 records this prediction. However, all four Gospels relate the Confession itself (John in a supplementary way). Acts often uses this confession to summarize the gospel we preach (or should preach).
2. His term *ekklesia* was a well-known name for God’s kingdom assembly. It was used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to designate Israel at Mt. Sinai and in other places. It was also used prophetically at least in Psalm 22, so quoted in Hebrews 2. It has become clear, of course, that Gentile believers are now included.

F. The kingdom ceased to be near.

1. Jesus revealed this change just before reaching Jerusalem for His passion and triumph. His parable in Luke 19:11-27 clearly predicted (a) that He would ascend to His Father’s throne, and (b) that the kingdom will be established when He returns.
2. Psalms 2 and 110 (and New Testament citations) both indicate that He is waiting in heaven to rule, not ruling already. No Scripture confuses God’s throne in heaven, where Messiah waits, with His covenanted throne of David.

G. Jesus repeatedly promised to return in glory to rule over the earth.

1. Some examples in Matthew of such promises are Matthew 16:27; 19:28-29; and 25:31-46.

2. He indicated various things that had to happen before that return. They are recorded in the Olivet Discourse reported by all the first three Gospels. They include wars, false messiahs, and worldwide tribulation.
3. He greatly emphasized the fact that His return with the kingdom will be unexpected.

H. Jesus transferred the kingdom program to a different “people.”

1. He took it away from the leaders of Israel in that generation. This was because they refused to respond to God, culminating in Messiah’s death.
2. He gave to others the task of preparing people for Him to come and rule. Most interpreters identify these others as the church today. Certainly we are “workers for the [coming] kingdom” (Col. 4:11). Some identify the other “people” as regenerated Israel in the future.
3. He will eventually restore the kingdom (program) to Israel. The apostle Paul’s illustration of the olive tree in Romans 11 confirms this. So do the apostles’ question and the Lord’s answer in Acts 1:6-7:

“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them:

“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority....”

Their question was not naïve, as some think. The Lord had just taught them “about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3) and “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). So we can be confident that God will finally save His deeply guilty people Israel. Just as many prophecies foresaw, His grace will be sufficient.

I. Here are some ways Jesus’ death and resurrection affect the kingdom.

1. By His death and triumph Jesus has become the designated Lord of all. Appointing Him as such, God has welcomed Him to sit on His own throne in heaven. There Jesus waits until time for His own kingdom to begin, over all “the nations” and “the ends of the earth” (Ps. 2). Then His (David’s) throne will be re-established on earth. While He is waiting, men are obliged to confess Him as King and submit to Him. He rules over them now only in the sense in which King David ruled in the years before Saul died.
2. Jesus’ “blood of the covenant” has made forgiveness possible and so ratified the eternal new covenant. Predicted by the prophets, this is the covenant of God’s Spirit—but administered by Jesus. John the Baptist foresaw that Jesus’ great work would be to impart the Spirit, which He began doing at Pentecost. By this means Jesus is now constituting His kingdom people from both Jews and Gentiles. No one will inherit the kingdom without it.

J. The main point of the gospel is Jesus’ Messiahship (kingship) rather than His divinity.

1. That conclusion is required if Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts present the gospel. Some insist that the gospel must specifically present our Lord’s pre-existence, divinity, virgin birth, and substitutionary death. Those elements are true but are quite unclear—except for three or four verses—in any of the Gospel books or Acts just listed. Yet, those books purport to give

the gospel (see Mark 1:1). What they preach is Jesus' kingship, not (or not clearly) His divinity. Their main summary of the gospel is "Jesus is the Messiah."

2. *Christ (Messiah)* is a royal title, not divine. *Son of God* is usually a virtual synonym for it. Hebrews 1:4-5 states that both titles were conferred on Jesus as a man. His Messiahship (kingship) was the issue at His trial and death.
3. Jesus' huge variety of miracles proves His Messiahship. That was the concern of John the Baptist in prison when he asked if Jesus is "the one who was to come." Jesus told John's messengers to report His miracles to John as proof that He indeed is the Ruler (Matt. 11:2-6). (Not proof that He came down from heaven, though He did.)

K. Why did God bring the kingdom near knowing that He would not establish it yet?

Follow this explanation patiently. Some of the steps include inferences.

1. He had chosen and prepared Israel to bring salvation to the world. He had selected that nation to be mankind's highest representatives. Because of His actions, covenants of promise, and prophecies, He had prepared them to bring His kingdom.
2. He gave Israel a choice He knew they would refuse. He offered them the kingdom packaged, as it were, in Jesus. To get the kingdom, they had to receive the King. But the King required that they repent, humbling themselves, which they refused to do. By thus rejecting Jesus, they rejected the kingdom.
3. He let Israel become hardened in unbelief. When Messiah revealed that the kingdom would be postponed, He explained the "secret" only to believers. The rest He left in the dark. Israel's choice remained uncluttered, and they hardened their hearts even more.
4. He let Israel kill Messiah as His own sacrifice for men's sins. Unwittingly, they cooperated with God's plan to save us; they "killed the author of life" (Acts 3:15-18). By this worst crime of the centuries, they slew for God the only innocent Lamb that could redeem mankind. (Since Israel represented us all, we all took part in that crime and sacrifice.)
5. He gives time for Messiah to prepare His people. While the kingdom is postponed, Jesus is presently growing His "body" to inherit with Him forever. With Israel still disobedient, the door has been opened to include Gentiles.

L. Why do the Epistles occasionally speak as though we were already in the kingdom?

1. They usually do not! Nearly every mention must refer to it as future; all of them can.²⁹
2. The Epistles sometimes refer to our position, which is far greater than our state. "He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness" (Col. 1:13a), but we still live there in that dominion. Similarly, our "life is now hidden with Christ in God....When Christ, who is [our] life appears, then [we] also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:3-4). These are legal (de jure) statements, not factual (de facto). They do not deny the reality that we still live on an earth ruled by the devil—and that Christ's kingdom is still future. Which kind of statement is more important? The legal, because it is far more lasting. So when Revelation 1:6 calls us "a kingdom," it reminds us of what we will be forever. Right now, however, we are merely

being “conceived” as such—and will be fully “born” at the resurrection. In that sense Jesus’ kingdom exists in an embryonic state.

M. What difference does it make if we believe the kingdom has begun?

It makes us twist Scriptures, redefine and depreciate the kingdom, and fail to get oriented.

1. It makes Scriptures confusing. Scores of passages that mention the kingdom do not make proper sense, because we think they are already fulfilled. So we lose interest. As a result, many believers are ignorant of the Old Testament Scriptures or spiritualize their meaning. Much of Christianity has lost sight of God’s original plan for mankind to rule over the material world.
2. It obscures the meaning of the kingdom. If it is already here, it is certainly different from what was predicted. Many now consider the real kingdom—the one described in prophecies such as in Luke chapters 1 and 2—a Jewish misunderstanding. They consider Jesus’ grace and forgiveness kingdom enough. But that is not His kingdom, only the path to inherit it. His kingdom will be far more impressive.
3. It takes our eyes off the coming triumph. What Scripture says to direct us to the future, we refer to the present or to heaven. For many believers, our goal has become going to heaven when we die or when the Lord comes. For such people the resurrection has lost its importance; in many funerals it is not even mentioned. Why do we really need new bodies if we get everything when we go to heaven at death rather than wait for the kingdom?

N. What did the early church believe about the kingdom?

This section is added to the studies.

1. For at least two centuries, all church writers did not identify anything present as the kingdom but looked for it to come. They considered it to be their future goal, as in Acts 14:22. George N.H. Peters discusses that situation in great detail in his propositions 70 to 76 (*The Theocratic Kingdom*, Vol. I, pp. 433 to 512).³⁰ It was only after they began identifying the church as the kingdom and neglecting or spiritualizing Old Testament prophecies, that they started talking about a present kingdom.
2. I will copy from Peters (I:304) only two samples from the Fathers. These two show what the early church believed about inheriting the **land promised to Abraham**.
 - Justin Martyr says that “*along with Abraham we shall inherit the holy land, when we shall receive the inheritance for an endless eternity, being the children of Abraham through the like faith.*” (Dialogue with Trypho, chapter 119)
 - Irenaeus says, “*It is fitting that the just, rising at the appearing of God, should in the renewed state receive the promise of inheritance which God covenanted to the Fathers, and should reign in it;*” then following the argument respecting the covenant promises made to Abraham and arguing, as we have done, that Abraham received them not, he continues: “*Thus, therefore, as God promised to him the inheritance of the earth, and he received it not during the whole time he lived in it, it is necessary that he should receive*

it, together with his seed, that is, with such of them as fear God and believe in Him—in the resurrection of the just”—and then showing that Christ and the Church are of the true seed and partakers of the same promises, he concludes: “Thus, therefore, those who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham; and the same are the children of Abraham. For God repeatedly promised the inheritance of the land to Abraham and his seed; and as neither Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, have enjoyed any inheritance in it, they will undoubtedly receive it at the resurrection of the just. For true and unchangeable is God; wherefore also He said: ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.’” (Against Heresies, chapter 32)

As a final conclusion: We cannot properly define the kingdom from the New Testament alone, without the Old Testament background. Those who do so are quite oblivious of its many aspects and total greatness. They tend to repeat the mistake of the five blind men invited to learn about an elephant, an animal new to them. Each felt a different part—trunk, ear, side, foot, tail—and thought he could describe the whole thing. Not one realized how enormous it was!

Appendix A: Peter's Acts 2 Sermon & the Kingdom

The evidence does not show that Jesus Messiah's kingdom began during His earthly ministry. But did it start when He ascended to heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father? An important passage in which to look for that answer is Acts 2, which tells what He did and what was said on the Day of Pentecost.

What Messiah did in Acts 2 began to fulfill a major prediction by John the Baptist. Its importance is partly seen in the fact that all four Gospels and Acts report the prediction. John said that after himself would come a greater one (Messiah) who would baptize people in the Holy Spirit (e.g., Mark 1:8; John 1:33). Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus told His disciples the same thing: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised....you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5). So on the Day of Pentecost Jesus began fulfilling that promise. Acts 2:1-4 describes the event: "a sound like...a violent wind...came from heaven" and "tongues spreading out like a fire...came to rest on each one of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages...."

To the crowd that gathered and observed, Peter explained what had happened (2:14-36). In each step he quoted Old Testament Scriptures. He first quoted one of the passages predicting the baptism in the Holy Spirit: "This is what was spoken about through the prophet Joel: '*And in the last days, it will be,*' God says, '*that I will pour out my Spirit on all people....*'" He went on quoting from Joel about other signs "*before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes*" (Acts 2:16-21). So God had promised through Joel that He would (a) give His Spirit and (b) provide signs, both "before the...day of the Lord." That means that both features would also precede the kingdom, because the kingdom will come during that Day (see also Zechariah 14:1-11). To repeat, the passage Peter quoted from Joel shows us that the gift of God's Spirit and the miraculous signs would both take place before the kingdom would start.

Next Peter preached the gospel. He gave the same information about Jesus as in the Gospel of Mark—not His pre-existence and divinity but His miracles, death, and resurrection. Here is the Acts summary of the facts he preached:

Jesus the Nazarene, a man clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds, wonders, and miraculous signs that God performed among you through him, just as you yourselves know – this man, who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles. But God raised him up, having released him from the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held in its power. For David says about him... (Acts 2:22-25).

At this point Peter quoted two prophecies by Jesus' forefather, David. The first one (from Psalm 16) predicted Messiah's resurrection. The second one (from Psalm 110) predicted His sitting at God's right hand in heaven waiting ("until..."). In both psalms David was not speaking about himself but about his future descendant, who will reign from David's throne.

So then, because he was a prophet and knew that God *had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne*, David by foreseeing this spoke about the resur-

rection of the Christ, that *he was neither abandoned to Hades*, nor did his body *experience decay*. This Jesus God raised up, and we are all witnesses of it. So then, exalted to the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he has poured out what you both see and hear. For David did not ascend into heaven, but he himself says, *'The Lord said to my lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."*' (Acts 2:30-35)

This leads to the grand climax of Peter's sermon: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that **God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ**" (v. 36). Both these titles are royal, pointing to His kingship.

- "God has made this Jesus...**Lord**," which title most commonly means "Master." "For this reason Christ died and returned to life, so that he may be the Lord [Master] of both the dead and the living" (Rom. 14:9; see vv. 4-9; also 10:9).
- "God has made this Jesus...**Christ**," which title means "the anointed [Ruler]."

So Jesus' works, death, resurrection, ascension to God's throne, and pouring out the Spirit prove that He is Lord and Christ. That means He will sit on David's throne. At present, however, He is still waiting on God's throne. (See my appendix on Psalm 110.) There is no evidence that David's throne has been moved to heaven! In fact, Jesus told a parable to keep us from such a conclusion. He corrected those who "thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately" (Luke 19:11). He explained that He would go "to a distant country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return" with it (vv. 12, 15). We are still waiting for His return.

Although Jesus is not yet reigning, the gospel proclaims His authority to do so. That is the main point in Peter's sermons in Acts 2 and Acts 10, also in the Gospel of Mark. The Epistles concur (e.g., Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9-11). In his Epistle to the Romans, for example, the apostle Paul wrote two main summaries of the gospel, Romans 1:3-4 and 10:9-10. I will close by looking at the first one, copying summary comments from my Survey of Romans.

This gospel... 1:3 concerning his Son who was a descendant of David with reference to the flesh, 1:4 who was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verse 3 shows level #1 of honor. It looks at the time when God's Son and Heir first appeared on the scene (Greek *tou genomenou*). That was in His flesh, that is, in relation to other men (Heb. 5:7). He was in the physical line of David, as required by God's promises to that king. That relationship is emphasized in the first verses of the New Testament (Matt. 1:1-17).

Verse 4 shows level #2 of honor. It looks at the time after God through His Spirit raised Jesus bodily from the dead. In that way God set Him apart not only as His Heir (Son) but as ready to reign. Now "at the right hand of God...he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool" (Heb. 10:12-13). But when the waiting is over and He "comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory" (Matt. 25:31).

In other words, Jesus has both the credentials (level #1) and the power (level #2) to bring the promised kingdom of God. He is the right One to rule, and He is ready to rule. Those two thoughts summarize the gospel. Nothing summarizes it better!

Appendix B: Peter's Acts 10 Sermon & the Gospel of Mark

Strong tradition says that Mark represents the apostle Peter's preaching. Printed below from the NET Bible is Peter's sermon at Caesarea (the "Gentile Pentecost") as summarized in Acts 10. I have added the same captions in all-capital letters that I added for Mark, thus showing that the sermon and the Gospel correspond. Acts gives great importance to this sermon, just as it does to the one in chapter 2. Before this sermon it narrates events explaining why Peter went with Gentiles to Caesarea to preach to Gentiles there. In the next chapter Acts records Peter's later report to the mother church in Jerusalem, part of which I will print.

I recommend that you read the whole sermon summary aloud. As you do, notice that like the Gospel of Mark and Acts 2, it presents Jesus' Messiahship rather than His divinity. None of those three sources tells hearers that Jesus was pre-existent or virgin-born. None mentions the fact that He died for our sins. Those things are all true but not included in Mark or either sermon—or in any of the many other evangelistic sermons in Acts. Notice also just what Peter wanted people to believe in order to "receive forgiveness of sins." They should believe that Jesus "is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead" (vv. 42-43). "Judge" includes its common Old Testament meaning of ruler. Thus, the conclusion is the same as in Acts 2: that Jesus is Lord and Messiah. It is the same thing Mark proves in his Gospel.

Here is Acts 10:33-44 to read, which includes the whole summary of Peter's sermon. In verse 33 the Roman Centurion Cornelius is speaking:

Acts 10:33 "...Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come. So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us."

GOOD NEWS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

10:34 Then Peter started speaking: "I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, 10:35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him. 10:36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all) –

JOHN'S BAPTISM

10:37 you know what happened throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John announced:

JESUS ANOINTED

10:38a with respect to Jesus from Nazareth, that God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power.

JESUS DOING GOOD AND HEALING

10:38b He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him. 10:39a We are witnesses of all the things he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem.

JESUS CRUCIFIED

10:39b They killed him by hanging him on a tree,

JESUS RAISED, SEEN, WITNESSED TO, BELIEVED ON

10:40 but God raised him up on the third day and caused him to be seen, 10:41 not by all the people, but by us, the witnesses God had already chosen, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

10:42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to warn them that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. 10:43 About him all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the message.

Now read Acts 11:13-18, from Peter's later report to the mother church in Jerusalem. He had just explained how God directed him to go preach to Gentiles. Next he told what Cornelius had said:

11:13 “He informed us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, 11:14 who will speak a message to you by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ 11:15 Then as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did on us at the beginning. 11:16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 11:17 Therefore if God gave them the same gift as he also gave us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?” 11:18 When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles.”

So the sermon summarized in Acts 10 brought repentance and eternal life to Gentiles. It will do the same today. However, its contents are like the Gospel of Mark and the sermon in Acts 2 rather than like evangelistic sermons nowadays. It omits facts that we usually emphasize—but dwells on Jesus' Messiahship, which we rarely mention. Are you sure our approach is better?

Appendix C: Psalm 110:1 & Messiah's Rule

Here is the Lord's proclamation to my lord:
"Sit down at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool!"

In Psalm 110:1 Yahweh (the Lord) welcomes Messiah (my lord) to sit at His own right hand until Yahweh puts down Messiah's enemies. Even before it began to be fulfilled, Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew 22:44 and parallels (Mark 12:36 and Luke 20:42b-43). Acts 2:34b-35 and Hebrews 1:13 quoted it after Jesus ascended and started fulfilling it. Hebrews 10:12-13 did not quote it exactly but used its words to the same effect: "But when this priest had offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, *he sat down at the right hand of God*, where he is now waiting *until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet.*" All these passages agree that David's "Lord" has ascended to sit at God's right hand in heaven and wait. His waiting there implies that when the time is ripe He will return to earth and reign on His own throne, which is David's throne (Luke 1:32-33; Rev. 3:21).

No Scripture ever calls God's throne in heaven David's throne. Read, for example, Psalm 89. Only one verse there (v. 14) speaks of God's throne in heaven. But four verses speak of David's earthly throne, which was in woeful condition. Verses 4, 29, and 36 remind God of His promise that David's throne will endure forever. Verse 44, however, laments, "You have brought to an end his splendor, and have knocked his throne to the ground."

Several New Testament passages make it clear what will happen when Jesus quits "waiting" and comes in glory. For example, Acts 3:19-21 shows that when the nation of Israel repents, Jesus will return with "times of refreshing" and will restore all things (cf. Matt. 19:28-29).

Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and so that he may send the Messiah appointed for you – that is, Jesus. This one heaven must receive until the time all things are restored, which God declared from times long ago through his holy prophets.

Overlooking such evidence that the kingdom is still future, some draw a different conclusion from Ephesians 1:20-22. There the apostle Paul comments on Messiah's present honor.

This power he [God] exercised in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And God put all things under Christ's feet, and he gave him to the church as head over all things.

This passage shows the great honor God has given Messiah after raising Him. "At his right hand" in heaven He is far above all other power. But this does not refer to His activity so much as to His authority. He is "far above...every name...not only in this age but also in **the one to come.**" He is **destined** to rule even over what does not exist yet, a statement like the one in Revelation 1:5!³¹ The next statement (Eph. 1:22a, quoting Psalm 8:6) confirms my conclusion: God "put all things under his feet." Hebrews 2:8 quotes the same words and says they are not fulfilled yet:

“You put all things under his control.” For when he *put all things under his control*, he left nothing outside of his control. At present we do not yet see *all things under his control...*

Notice that from the day it was composed, Psalm 8 spoke of future things as though they had already happened. It is not unusual to do so when the future is unambiguous and important. The New Testament often speaks of future things as though they were present. “...For everything belongs to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present **or the future**. Everything belongs to you...” (1 Cor. 3:21-23). The same mindset can explain the very rare statements that we are already the coming kingdom or in it. As I explain elsewhere, they are *de jure* statements, not *de facto*. An example is

...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves... (Col. 1:12-13)

We live as though the future has arrived. For example,

our salvation is now nearer than when we became believers. The night has advanced toward dawn; the day is near. So then we must lay aside the works of darkness, and put on the weapons of light. Let us live decently as in the daytime... (Romans 13:11-13)

One more matter should be addressed in Psalm 110:1. Both it and Psalm 8 allude to a coming victory over Messiah's/man's enemies. Messiah will sit at God's right hand until God subdues them. But even that will have two epochs, if premillennialists are right. (a) The first epoch will be when God puts those enemies down during the tribulation described in Revelation 6-19. At the end of that process Messiah will come to earth (ch. 19), raise His saints to life, and rule for a thousand years (ch. 20). (b) The second epoch will be at the end of the thousand years, when He fully defeats the last enemy, death. That defeat of death has its own stages: (1) His own past resurrection, (2) His saints at His coming, (3) the destruction of death itself. I will label the three stages as listed in 1 Corinthians 15:22-28, also underline the words that separate them.

15:22 For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 15:23 But each in his own order: (1) Christ, the firstfruits; (2) then when Christ comes, those who belong to him. 15:24 (3) Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has brought to an end all rule and all authority and power. 15:25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 15:26 The last enemy to be eliminated is death. 15:27 For **he has put everything in subjection under his feet**. But when it says “everything” has been put in subjection, it is clear that this does not include the one who put everything in subjection to him. 15:28 And when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.

In summary, Psalms 8 and 110 will each have a dual fulfillment. First, Messiah will come to rule when all His enemies are subjected (Ps. 110:1). But second, His rule itself will have a transitional stage (the millennium), after which there will not even be death. Our concern should be

to assure our participation in His triumph, to be sure we have “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven...” (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

NOTES

¹ See my “Survey of Romans.” Romans was not designed to preach the gospel but to show its power. However, it does have two important gospel summaries in 1:3-4 and 10:8-10. The first summary has the following two parts “regarding his [God’s] Son”:

- In His flesh, that is, in relation to other men, He was in the physical line of David, as required by God’s promises to that king.
- By raising Him from the dead by His Holy Spirit, God acknowledged Him as the “Son of God with power” (cf. Acts 13:33).

² Matthew 1:1 is “like an umbilical cord with five links to the Old Testament.” An umbilical cord conveys life from a mother to her unborn baby. The term is used for similar things, such as, the bundle of lines connecting an astronaut to his spacecraft when he must work outside it.

³ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1959). George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ, as Covenanted in the Old Testament and Presented in the New Testament*, 3 vols (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1957).

⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). Waltke taught in a dispensational seminary but later converted to amillennial theology. With great erudition he provides much helpful commentary in the Old Testament (“all pure gold,” says one reviewer). But especially in the New Testament, his amillennial presuppositions wreak havoc. Various times he assures us that the early church did not understand eschatology as well as amillennialists do. For example:

Second, the primitive church, lacking the teachings of Jesus and the illumination of the Spirit, mistakenly thought along with all of Jewry that the glories of Messiah Jesus would also be fulfilled literally in the land of Canaan. (p. 584)

⁵ Isaiah 7 gives an episode from the life of young king Ahaz of the royal “house of David” in Judah. He was afraid of the kings of nearby Aram and Israel, allied against him (vv. 1-2). Challenged to ask the LORD for a sign, he refused (vv. 3-12); so the LORD gave his “house” a sign (vv. 13-14a). A young woman (Heb. *almah*, not *betulah*) gets pregnant (Heb. *harah*, “is pregnant,” the same word as to Hagar in Genesis 16:11). She bears a son who gets named “Immanuel” (v. 14b). The next words continue to speak about *that baby*: “He will eat curds and honey....But before [that], the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste” (vv. 15-16). That “young woman/virgin” had to give birth to that “Immanuel,” or much of the prophecy would have been useless to Ahaz.

⁶ The “gift” of the Holy Spirit is the same as “baptism in” the Spirit. Both terms are used for the same activity on the Jewish Pentecost and also on the “Gentile Pentecost”: Acts 1:4-5 and 2:33, also 10:47 and 11:15-17.

⁷ The promise of baptism in the Spirit was first of all for Israel. When Israel finally gets converted (Rom. 11:26), Jesus will also baptize them in the Spirit and make them part of the *ekklesia*.

⁸ The apostles were authenticated by miraculous signs. Paul reminded the Corinthians that he had done “the signs of an apostle...signs and wonders and powerful deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12). But by the time Hebrews 2:2-3 was written, such signs were spoken of in past tense. They had apparently ceased.

⁹ Each subdivision of Matthew emphasizes some aspect of the Lord's ministry and ends with a discourse. For the third subdivision of Division I, I have suggested the title "The King Rejected" (chs. 11-13). It ends in these "Secrets about the Kingdom."

¹⁰ The NIV translates the *proago eis* combination correctly both in Matthew 14:22 and 26:32. Why, then, does it (and most translations) mistranslate/mislead when the same combination is used in 21:31? Apparently because of the current tradition that the kingdom was already being entered. It mistranslates Matthew 11:12 for the same theological reason.

¹¹ The church is Messiah's kingdom assembly. In 1 Peter 2:9 words are applied to the church from Exodus 19, when Israel originally became God's kingdom. George Peters deals with the issues of the transfer of the kingdom in Propositions 59 to 65 of his *Theocratic Kingdom* (I:386-418). His summary of Proposition 59 is "This Kingdom of God, offered to the Jewish nation, lest the purpose of God fail, is to be given to others who are adopted." Peters emphasizes that the "new" elect ones are "engrafted" on Israel's tree (Romans 11). Therefore, they continue the previous election without canceling Israel's unique promises.

¹² The Aramaic translation of *Cristos* is *Messias* (Anointed), which is *Messiah* in English (John 1:41).

¹³ This is some of the substantial evidence that *Christ* and *Son of God* were His titles as a human being. See Hebrews 1:4-5 and my writing "The Title *Son of God*," separately or in my new Romans commentary.

¹⁴ What draws near **can** indeed arrive—but not necessarily. Some argue that *engiken* definitely means "has arrived" when used in Luke 10:9 with the preposition *epi*, which has the idea of "down upon." In the other New Testament uses in respect to the kingdom (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:11), *engiken* has no preposition with it. But the verb, just like the cognate preposition *engus* (near), actually **emphasizes** nearness rather than arrival. (There are various ways—not this verb—to express arrival.) And *epi* simply pictures the kingdom as having come from heaven.

¹⁵ Amillennialists teach that by tying up the "strong man" Jesus began the "thousand years" reign of Revelation 20. They identify it as the same action, on the same occasion, that the angel in Revelation 20:2-3 took:

He seized the dragon – the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan – and tied him up for a thousand years. The angel then threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed it so that he could not deceive the nations until the one thousand years were finished.

Thus, amillennialists believe the "thousand years" began at Jesus' first coming and still continue. Premillennialists, in contrast, believe that all of Revelation 20 will follow the Lord's glorious return described at the end of chapter 19. The restraint of Satan will be much more complete than in the Gospels.

¹⁶ In Matthew 18:3 the disciples were not in the kingdom: "I tell you the truth, unless you turn around and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven!" See also verses 8 and 9.

¹⁷ Similar to the *application* in Romans 9:25-29 of passages from Hosea is another example in Romans 10. In that chapter Paul discusses "human responsibility." In verses 16-21 he shows that the Scriptures foresaw Jewish disobedience of the gospel. In order to do so, he must show that they *heard the gospel*. So in verse 18 he quotes Psalm 19:4 to show how widely the good news spread. But in

doing so, he is making *an application* of the psalm. The psalm does not really refer to the gospel but to the worldwide witness of the heavens. Although Paul applies its words *as though it prophesied about the gospel*, he does not change its meaning.

¹⁸ Romans 2 shows clearly that God does not give “immortality” to everyone. See my writing “Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?”

¹⁹ The NET Bible explains why (at least most) textual experts do not consider Mark 16:9-20 part of the original Gospel. It then says, “Double brackets have been placed around this passage to indicate that most likely it was not part of the original text of the Gospel of Mark. In spite of this, the passage has an important role in the history of the transmission of the text, so it has been included in the translation.”

²⁰ Even before the prophecy quoted here, see those in Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 16:5; 18:7; 19:23-25; 24:21-23. For sample prophecies in another book, read Zechariah 2:10-13; 14:1-4, 8-9, 16-21.

²¹ For those who believe in the God of the Bible, this is no question about His ability. He who created heaven and earth can surely make them new!

²² On the meaning of Matthew 11:12 and Luke 16:16, see also Appendix B of my “Matthew: Self Study Guide.”

²³ This transformation of God’s people is called “a new covenant” in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The gift of the Spirit to “all” rather than a few is also emphasized in Joel 2:28. Of course, this gift—and the resulting new birth—could not even begin until Jesus was glorified.

²⁴ God is indeed preparing citizens and heirs for that future kingdom (Matt. 25:34; Acts 14:22; James 2:5). But at present they are “brought...into the kingdom of the Son” only in the same sense as they are “rescued...from the dominion of darkness” (Col. 1:13). So far, that action is juridical, not yet factual.

²⁵ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1959) 380. His discussion of this interrogation continues through page 382.

²⁶ John 8:36a. “My kingdom **is**...” does not refer to a present kingdom. It is common to speak of important future things as though they were present. For example, in context the following present tenses definitely refer to the future: “God’s judgment...**is** [will be] based on truth” (Rom. 2:2), “they **are** [will be] children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36).

²⁷ John 8:36a. “My kingdom is not **of this world**.” This preposition + noun (*ek tou kosmou*) can also refer to character, as it does twice in 17:14. However, in 18:36a it makes better sense, with McClain, to take it as source. NIV has recognized that in verse 36b: “But now My kingdom is **from** another place.” Notice also the word “now,” which NASB translates “as it is.”

²⁸ In *The Theocratic Kingdom* George N.H. Peters exalts God’s wisdom in the timing of His revelations. In Proposition 34 (I:242-247), for example, he discusses the fact that “The Prophets describe this restored Kingdom...without distinguishing between the First and Second Advents.” On pages 232-233 he gives another example. God promised that

the Gentiles are to have part in the blessings of Abraham....yet, *the mode* of incorporating these Gentiles [was] left for future revelation. The call of the Gentiles is given in a way that implies that certain events connected with it must *first* be fulfilled and *additional revelation* be

given before it can be properly comprehended. In the very nature of the case, it could not be otherwise, for if every event, link after link in the chain of Providence, had been revealed systematically and minutely, it would have interfered with the moral freedom of man, or it would have placed him in a position from which to consider himself the victim of unalterable predestinated circumstances. Thus e.g. had the Word predicted all the events respecting the First Advent and its result, the conduct of the Jews, Romans, etc., in such a form, as necessary preliminaries to the call, it would have been terribly depressing, and it would materially (2 Cor. 2:8) have interfered with the fulfilment of events. There is, consequently, *a deep wisdom*, such as man could not evince, in those isolated, broken predictions. A blessed *sufficiency* is given to vindicate God's knowledge, to impress His mercy, and to invite trust in His power, that the Messiah will be (as the Jews also held, Mac. 2:7, 14) "the King of the world."

²⁹ Nearly every mention of God's kingdom in the Epistles can or must refer to it as future. Here is a list of all the places where Greek *basilea* is used for it in those books. Read each of them in context. Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 4:20; 6:9; 6:10; 15:24; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:13; 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:1; 4:18; Hebrews 1:8; 12:28; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 1:6; 1:9; 11:15; 12:10.

³⁰ Here are Peters' summaries of those propositions:

Prop. 70. The apostles, after Christ's ascension, did not preach, either to Jews or Gentiles, that the Kingdom was established.

Prop. 71. The language of the apostles confirmed the Jews in their Messianic hopes of the Kingdom.

Prop. 72. The doctrine of the Kingdom, as preached by the apostles, was received by the early Church.

Prop. 73. The doctrine of the Kingdom preached by the apostles and elders raised up no controversy with the Jews.

Prop. 74. The belief in the speedy Advent of Christ, entertained both by the apostles and the churches under them, indicates what Kingdom was believed in and taught by the first Christians.

Prop. 75. The doctrine of the Kingdom, as held by the churches established by the apostles, was perpetuated.

Prop. 76. The doctrine of the Kingdom was changed under the Gnostic and Alexandrian influence.

³¹ Revelation 1:5 calls Jesus Messiah "the ruler over the kings of the earth" before He actually begins to rule.