

## Does the Church Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom?

(An appendix for my self-study course on Matthew)

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*The church (Greek ekklesia) is the **assembly** Messiah is preparing for His coming kingdom. Hebrews 2:12 quotes Psalm 22:22 with this meaning. In this appendix “us” and “our” refer to the church. Emphasis is sometimes added to quotations.*

“This gospel [good news] of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world” (Matt. 24:14).<sup>1</sup> That message should interest the nation of Israel, because God is going to “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6). He will fulfill all His promises to that nation. But does the same message concern the church? Some interpreters say no. They wrongly see too much difference between

1. the church as Messiah’s body and redeemed Israel of the future
2. what they consider a “heavenly” hope for the church and an “earthly” kingdom for Israel

These two distinctions contradict the Gospel of Matthew—and the rest of the New Testament.

1. Consider the first wrong distinction—in regard to Messiah’s body. The apostle Paul explains that Messiah forms His body by baptizing men in/with the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12–13). Yet, this great work of Messiah was promised to Israel. In Matthew 3:11, as in all the Gospels, it was to **Israel** that John the Baptist promised “He will baptize **you** with the Holy Spirit.” This simply restated such prophecies as Ezekiel 36:27 (“I will put my Spirit within you”) and Joel 2:28 (“I will pour out my Spirit”). Just as by His Spirit God changes us into His children and heirs (Rom. 8:16–17), so He promised for Israel. Jesus alluded to such prophecies when talking to “Israel’s teacher.” Nicodemus should have known from such prophecies that no one can “enter the kingdom” without being “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5–10). All of Messiah’s future kingdom assembly will have been so born/baptized.

To say the same thing from the perspective of Hebrews 9:15: Israelites could never receive their “eternal inheritance” if they remained under the Old Covenant. They must be forgiven, then transformed by God’s Spirit under the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6, 18).

Messiah began this work at Pentecost (Acts 2). Both before and after that event, what happened then was identified as His baptizing in/with the Spirit (Acts 1:5; 11:15–17). However, on that day itself Peter explained by using Joel’s terminology: “Messiah” (Acts 2:31), he said, “received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and **poured out**” that heavenly Gift (2:33). Thus, “pouring out the Spirit” is the same as “baptizing in/with the Spirit.” And by this action Messiah began to build His body, the church. When Israel finally repents (Zech. 12:10; 13:1; Rom. 11:26–27), will He not, as promised, baptize them too? On what basis should we doubt that Spirit-baptized Israel will become part of Messiah’s body?

Therefore, redeemed Israel will not be basically different from the *ekklesia* (church) but part of it. Restored to God’s favor, they will receive the eternal inheritance.

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<sup>1</sup> As to the fact that the gospel is in Matthew, see my notes on 26:13 and 28:20.

2. Consider the second wrong distinction mentioned above: between an “earthly” kingdom for Israel and a “heavenly” hope for the church. There is no such distinction in Matthew. That book constantly refers to the future kingdom as our hope (for example, Matt. 5:3, 10, 20; 7:21). When it records the Lord’s clear promises to come back to earth in glory to reign, it always assumes that believers will share in that rule. For whom did Matthew write these promises? Certainly for members of the church, whether Jews or not. Books for the church do not and cannot present distinct hopes for its members. “In the church there is neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal. 3:28).

Furthermore, a “heavenly” hope can be on earth. Right now our inheritance is “kept in heaven for [us]” (1 Pet. 1:4) but will be “given [to us] when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pet. 1:13). As Jesus showed often in Matthew, that will be when He comes to reign (Matt. 13:41–43; 16:27; 19:28; 25:31, 34). The rock that Daniel saw coming from God “became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35). That will be the kingdom of heaven on earth, the same picture as in Revelation 21–22. A heavenly hope to be enjoyed on earth.

Jewish hopes were heavenly in the same way. It was originally to Jews that Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19–20). Why should we think that their heavenly treasures are any different from ours? Passages like Hebrews 6:13–20 and 11:8–16 show that they are identical. Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham’s hope was both earthly and heavenly. Earthly: He “made his home in **the promised land** like a stranger” (v. 9). Yet, he “did not receive the things promised” (v. 13). Why not? Because he was looking for a “**heavenly**” country (v. 16) and “the city with foundations” (v. 10). That city is “the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22), his goal and ours.

After descending to the renewed earth (Rev. 21:1–2, 10), that heavenly Jerusalem will have “the throne of God and of the Lamb [Messiah]” (Rev. 22:3). It will be the capital city of the eternal kingdom. It will be Abraham’s city, enabling him to inherit his promised land. And saved Gentiles will “take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11), not on a neighboring star. God’s “servants will serve him...And they will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:3, 5).

In other words, the church and restored Israel have basically the same hope. It is both heavenly and earthly—the coming rule of heaven on earth. This does not erase the distinctions between saved nations, which will persist even into the perfected form of the kingdom (Rev. 21:24, 26; 22:2). And Israel will finally be the head of the nations, rather than the tail (Deut. 28:13).<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, the Apostle Paul saw no contradiction in preaching to Gentiles both God’s grace and the future kingdom. Far along in his ministry, he summarized his message in Ephesus as “testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24). In his next sentence he summarized his message as “preaching the kingdom.” Indeed, it is good news that by God’s grace both Jews and Gentiles can participate in Messiah’s coming kingdom “for ever and ever” (Dan. 7:18, 27).

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<sup>2</sup> “The names of the twelve tribes of Israel” on the gates (Rev. 21:12) will forever remind us of God’s grace in and through those tribes. “The names of the twelve apostles” on the foundations (v. 14) will remind us how people worldwide came to be included. Do the “twenty-four elders” John saw in heaven (Rev. 4:4) combine Jews and Gentiles? It is unclear, because the Jewish Sanhedrin itself—with no Gentiles—included twenty-four elders and twenty-four chief priests.