

Realized Eschatology

Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

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OT and NT here mean Old Testament and New Testament. Messiah often takes the place of the same royal title Christ; both mean "anointed" to be king. Unless otherwise stated, Bible quotations are from NIV 1984. For more discussion see "The Kingdom Will Come As the Prophets Predicted: A Critique of Waltke's Case for Amillennialism"; "[Did Jesus Establish His Kingdom?](#)"; and "[The Four Gospels: The Kingdom Offered & Postponed.](#)"

Confusion & Its Cause

Many are confused about the kingdom. The Bible is not confused. As an evangelical writing to evangelicals, I share your confidence that the Bible is God's truth and makes good sense. All of it. We claim to "believe the prophets." And we believe that to please God and be fruitful for Him, we must walk in His light. All of it. The main theme that unifies the Bible is Messiah's coming kingdom. Matthew alone refers to it over fifty times by name. Yet, a great many believers now cannot even tell you what the kingdom is. Some of them speak about being born into it, living by its rules, extending it—*expressions never found in the Bible!* But they neglect real Bible expressions, such as, "inherit the kingdom," and related doctrines, such as, our resurrection.

Later I will discuss what the kingdom means (what it will be), listing some of its main aspects as the Bible often predicts them. For now, just remember Peter's summary in Acts 3:20-21: God "will send the Messiah, [who] must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets." When Jesus comes in glory to restore the world, that will be heaven on earth!

The "holy prophets" left us many descriptions to enlighten us. Why do some evangelicals not study them or believe them? Often because their teachers avoid such Scriptures or give them meanings that only "specialists" could have guessed. For example, scores of prophecies affirm that God's guilty nation Israel will finally be restored and honored. Nowadays, however, many "experts" say those passages don't really mean Israel but somebody else. If so, why should a non-expert bother to study them? Why jump into water that seems so deep and troubled?

The main cause of such confusion is the widespread belief that Messiah's kingdom has already begun (without Israel's restoration). Even some good Bible translations unjustifiably favor that view. Take an example from NIV 1984. In it Matthew 11:12 says, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven *has been forcefully advancing*, and *forceful men lay hold of it*" (improved in NIV 2010). But to translate it that way violates the normal usage of the Greek words (and contradicts all the context in Matthew 11-12). NASB does better: "...the kingdom of heaven *suffers violence*, and *violent men*

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

take it by force [or, plunder it].” The verse does not speak of the kingdom growing but being plundered by wicked men. That is what was happening in Jewish response to the kingdom, which *at that time was near* (Matt. 3:2, 4:17; 10:7) and even present in its representatives (12:28).

Jewish opposition to God’s good news continued, as documented in Acts and the Epistles. The early church knew that it would participate in Israel’s blessings (as seen in Romans 11). But soon it began declaring itself the replacement for Israel. By the end of the third century, the belief evolved that the church is the promised kingdom. That view spread like noxious weeds choking out important teachings and resulting in the current confusion sketched above. Like every false doctrine, it has “proof texts” and specious arguments. Indeed, at His first coming Messiah began achieving some eternal things (“realized eschatology”). I will show that those things guarantee His “coming in his kingdom” (Matt. 16:28), which is the great hope for every believer. *But they are not that kingdom!*

*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness,
which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day—
and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing....
The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack
and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. (2 Tim. 4:8, 18)*

Contents

Part I. Definitions (of “realized eschatology” and Messiah’s kingdom)	page 3
Chart A: Some Aspects of the Coming Kingdom Often Predicted but Unfulfilled	page 4
Part II. Scriptural Facts that Show Realized Eschatology (Each helps guarantee that the kingdom will come as predicted.)	page 5
1. The Gospels spoke of the kingdom as near or present.	
2. Jesus fulfilled various prophecies related to the kingdom.	
3. The NT relates Jesus’ first advent to “the last days.”	
4. The NT relates Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to His ruling.	
5. The NT designates Jesus as having royal titles.	
6. The church is related to God’s kingdom.	
7. The church fulfills some promises to Israel.	
Part III. Conclusions (include what difference this belief makes)	page 15
Appendix A: Matthew 12:28 & Realized Eschatology	page 18
Appendix B: Peter’s Sermon in Acts 2: The Beginning of the Church.....	page 20

Part I. Definitions

What is “realized eschatology”? Although most Christians have probably never heard this term in a sermon, it is now quite common in doctrinal studies. Begin with the second word. Based on the Greek word for “last” (*eschatos*), *eschatology* is the biblical teaching about final things. Among such things are the bodily resurrection, final judgment, and Messiah’s promised eternal kingdom. *Realized* in this case means *brought to reality*. So realized eschatology is the teaching that *some* of the final things have already begun in some sense or degree. Probably all evangelical Bible students believe that.

Take eternal life as an example. It is eschatological and, accordingly, is often presented as a *future* attainment in the New Testament. For example, Matthew 19:28-29 puts it at “the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne.” On that glorious occasion, Jesus continues, every disciple “*will inherit eternal life*.” So eternal life is a future inheritance. Likewise, Romans 2:6-7 says we will get it in the coming “day of...God’s righteous judgment.” That is when “*he will give eternal life*” to those that seek it. Future! Yet, John 5:24 assures us that each believer *already* “has eternal life.” As some say, we “*already*” have it but “*not yet*” in its fullness.

Take the new covenant as another example. This is the arrangement between God and men that will make our participation in the eternal kingdom eternally possible. It was *inaugurated* (formally begun) by the death of Messiah Himself. It began to be extended to mankind when He began “baptizing in” (permanently granting, Acts 11:15-17) the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But its effects have barely begun. Already in operation but not yet in full.

In Part II I will list some of the Scriptural facts favoring this “already, not yet” eschatology. Each fact shows one or more aspects of eternal reality already realized. However, all such facts together do not amount to the inauguration of Messiah’s kingdom. As I will show, they give evidence that His kingdom is coming, not that it has begun.

What is Messiah’s kingdom? We must distinguish it from God’s universal kingdom. God has always ruled from heaven, of course, over everyone and everything everywhere. But the kingdom that *drew near* in New Testament times—and is often mentioned there—is the one promised for Messiah. The Jews called it “the kingdom of God” or “the kingdom of [from] heaven” or simply “the kingdom.” They got its description from the OT prophets. They knew it will “fill the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35). It will include all “the nations” and “the ends of the earth” (Ps. 2:8). They knew Messiah “will reign on David’s throne” (Isa. 9:7) from “Zion/Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:3) as world capital. God “will turn godlessness away from Jacob [the nation of Israel]” (Rom. 11:26, interpreting Isa. 59:21) and “make a new covenant with the house of Israel” (Jer. 31:31). “Nation will not take up sword against nation” (Isa. 2:4). Even “the trees of the field will clap their hands” (Isa. 55:12). In short, God will “restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:21). A glorious triumph for His people, for nature, and for Himself! “Do you believe the prophets?” (Acts 26:27). If so, you expect the same kingdom the Jews did.

I have listed some of its essential but unfulfilled aspects in Chart A.

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

Changed definition? Many Bible teachers no longer—or rarely—describe the kingdom as the prophets did. They think that the kingdom itself is one of the final things that have become reality (realized eschatology). They may concede that it will eventually come in glory. But it has already been inaugurated, they say, in a spiritual form. Messiah already rules from heaven. We already live in His kingdom, must abide by its rules, and extend it through our witness. Russell D. Moore claims that among evangelical teachers this view is now a consensus, or nearly so: “The gradual consensus developing within several significant quarters of American evangelicalism sees the eschatological Kingdom in terms of a tension between the ‘already’ of initial fulfillment and the ‘not yet’ of future consummation.”¹

As already stated, in Part II I will document that there is indeed some realized eschatology. But that *does not mean that Messiah's kingdom itself has been inaugurated!* The fulfilled aspects guarantee that the glorious kingdom will come as predicted but do not redefine it. Furthermore, in my Conclusions (Part III) I will show that what we believe about this makes a lot of difference. For comments on all kingdom passages in the Gospels, see my writing [“The Four Gospels: The Kingdom Offered & Postponed.”](#)

Chart A Some Aspects of the Coming Kingdom Often Predicted but Unfulfilled	
Kingdom Aspect	Sample References from Isaiah
The king (Messiah) will be publicly glorious and triumphant, sitting on David's throne.	Isa. 9:6-7; 24:23; 32:1
The world capital will be Jerusalem.	Isa. 2:2-4; 60:1-17
The nation Israel will be repentant, redeemed, and exalted.	Isa. 14:1-2; 27:6-9; 32:15-18
Wicked nations, especially Israel's enemies, will have been defeated.	Isa. 26:11-15; 34:2
All nations will live justly and peacefully, subject to Messiah.	Isa. 2:2-4; 19:23-25; 42:1-4; 51:4-5
The world will be full of righteous people who know God.	Isa. 11:9; 66:23
Nature and mankind will be freed from the curse.	Isa. 11:6-9; 35:1-6; 55:12-13; 65:17

¹ Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 36.

Part II. Scriptural Facts that Show Realized Eschatology

This part gives Scriptures for seven facts. After each fact the words "SOME ARGUE" introduce the wrong use of the fact to prove that the kingdom was inaugurated. The word "INSTEAD" introduces a better use of the fact: to prove that the future kingdom is guaranteed.

Fact 1. The Gospels spoke of the kingdom as near or present.

This fact has the longest discussion and affects all the others.

- A. The kingdom is the main subject in the Gospels, where, for example,
- Matthew alone mentions it over fifty times by that name.
 - Matthew's main theme is that Jesus is the king (e.g., Matt. 1:1, 16-17; 2:2; 16:13-20; 26:63; 27:11, 37).
 - John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus' representatives constantly preached "the kingdom *has drawn near*" (giving the meaning of Greek *engiken*, Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 10:9, 11).
- B. The Gospels identify the kingdom as present in some sense and show Jesus defeating the present world ruler Satan (Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:20-21). Some passages trace this victory especially to His death (John 12:30-32; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14-15).
- C. Some of Jesus' parables of the kingdom (e.g., Matt. 13:31-32, 33) picture a small beginning in contrast to a magnificent conclusion. Several of those parables begin, "the kingdom is like..." then describe something present.

SOME ARGUE that this Gospel emphasis on Messiah's kingdom implies that it was inaugurated in an unexpected form. God would not bring it near, they think, unless He was about to establish it. In fact, some allege that the Greek verb translated "has come near" (Gr. *engiken*) actually means "has arrived." Some teach that Jesus was establishing His predicted kingdom as He drove out the devil's agents. Others believe it was inaugurated at the time of Pentecost in Acts 2 (see Fact 4). If it began, it is far different from what the prophets described (see Fact 2). It is only spiritual and lacks many predicted aspects (see Chart A). Dispensationalists² also think the parables picture a present spiritual kingdom but deny that it was the predicted one. They insist on a normal interpretation of previous prophecies. Both they and most others who believe that a kingdom began also believe that it will eventually come in glory and involve the restoration of the whole cosmos.

² Dispensationalists get their name from giving great importance to distinct periods of history they call "dispensations." Each such period features certain revelations, relations to God, and tests. All dispensationalists believe that Christ will rule in a kingdom on earth, just as prophetic writings predicted. They insist that such writings be interpreted normally (literally). But they consider the church quite distinct from Israel in character and goal and quite unforeseen before the NT. Growing up in that system, I often heard that Israel is earthly but the church heavenly. As the bride of Christ, they said, the church will rule with Him. We considered Scriptures that emphasized Israel, such as, the Gospel of Matthew, of secondary importance for the church.

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

INSTEAD, the kingdom from its inception will be just as the prophets described it (see Fact 2), making due allowance for figurative language³ and progressive revelation.⁴ God did not bring it near to inaugurate it but to accomplish other matters of extreme importance (see conclusion #1 on page 15). The greatest was Messiah's death "for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2) and His resurrection. Without that, the kingdom would be empty—no one forgiven, no one living eternally to inherit it. To redeem such people, God's willing sacrifice was Messiah Himself. God's agent to offer Messiah was the nation Israel. God put the kingdom in the reach of Israel so that by their refusal it would become available to all of us.

Israel is the key. If you deny Israel's eternal importance, you cannot understand what happened. To Israel God had said, "You only have I chosen [lit., known] of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). They were God's "kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:6), representing all mankind before Him. They alone were His OT kingdom (Ps. 114:2); in their hands was His program for the final kingdom (Matt. 21:33-46). Through the centuries He was preparing Israel for that great goal of the ages. Nearly all the prophecies included them by name; the kingdom will never come without them. When it drew near, Jesus was "sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" and sent His heralds only to them (Matt. 15:24; 10:5-7). But Israel had a choice.

Israel's choice. "Repent, because the kingdom *has drawn near* [Gr. *engiken*]" was the invitation to the chosen nation. Neither John nor Jesus defined the kingdom, because Israel knew what it would be. And Israelites who believed the message did expect it to start soon. But the verb neither means nor guarantees actual arrival, as you can see from its biblical use.⁵ Israel's choice was whether to repent and recognize the king or disown Him. Until His final, "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1-11), the king did not proclaim who He was but showed them His credentials. He demonstrated the power of the kingdom, doing miracles that could establish it as predicted. Indeed, in His person the kingdom "came upon" them (Matt. 12:28) and was "in their midst" (Luke 17:21). By God's Spirit He was overcoming the evil world ruler.

Israel had all the evidence they could ask for—but "they did not repent" (Matt. 11:20). As predicted, they rejected the king and finally killed Him without realizing who He was (Isa. 53:1-6; Acts 3:17-18; 13:27). In fact, they were offering the only sacrifice capable of saving mankind! But God raised Him, thus *appointing* Him as "the Son of God in power" (Rom. 1:4), to be dis-

³ We must be aware that prophets used figurative language. Sometimes, for example, they described international turmoil as celestial disturbances. Thus, Jeremiah pictured the fall of Jerusalem as a return to pre-creation chaos (Jer. 4:23-28). Likewise, Ezekiel introduced heavenly signs when picturing the fall of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 32:7-8). Aspects of the coming kingdom were sometimes described in figures drawn from its earlier form. Is that the case in Ezekiel 40-48, which pictures a restoration of old covenant temple and sacrifices? Probably not, because 43:9-11 shows it was an *offer* that Israel did not respond to. At any rate, the non-figurative repetition of essential elements (see Chart A) shows what cannot be missing in the coming kingdom.

⁴ Progressive revelation adds new elements when the time is ripe, such as, two advents for Messiah instead of one. God would not use it to abrogate essential elements of His promises or covenants, such as, Israel's election.

⁵ John, Jesus, and Jesus' representatives repeatedly preached that "the kingdom...*has drawn near*." The Greek verb meant only that what had been farther away was now near. Whatever or whoever draws near may arrive (Eph. 2:13) or not arrive (Luke 15:25, 28). Consider two examples of the same verb in the same form as used for the kingdom. James 5:8 says, "the Lord's coming *is near*"; and 1 Peter 4:7 says, "the end of all things *is near*." Yet, neither has arrived. Nor has the expected kingdom.

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

cussed under Fact 4. Then He invited the Son, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Acts 2:34-35). When the Father subjects those enemies to the Son, then He will send Him to rule (Ps. 2:8; Rev. 19:11-21).

Apparent delay. To repeat, God *did not intend for Messiah to rule* at His first coming. But neither did God complicate Israel’s decision by revealing the parts of His plan. He had told no one that Messiah would come twice (1 Peter 1:10-12). Therefore, prophets like the priest Zechariah and his son John the Baptist expected immediate relief and judgment (Luke 1:67-71; Matt. 3:10). What would godly Israelites like them think when the kingdom drew near but did not start? At best, that it was delayed or postponed. And that is exactly what Jesus prepared them for when it became evident that Israel was rejecting Him (Matt. 11-12). He began revealing the “delay” by telling parables explained only to His disciples (Matt. 13). In them He contrasted the modest beginning to the glorious future. The judgment will take place, and the kingdom will begin, only at “the end of the age.” That was what Jesus explained in the only interpretations supplied to us (Matt. 13:39-40; 49-50).⁶ All His kingdom parables can be understood with that same meaning. The apparent delay is not filled with the kingdom itself but with preparation for it. It will come with all its predicted glory when Messiah comes again.

Accordingly, during His last months of ministry Jesus often promised to come again in glory (e.g., Matt. 16:27; 19:28; 25:31). The kingdom was still *near* in His person (Luke 10:9, 11; 17:21) but *future* as to inauguration. As God’s anointed king and Servant, Jesus continued to partially fulfill such prophecies as Isaiah 61:1-3 and 42:1-4 (see Fact 2). But just before reaching Jerusalem He changed the picture. He told a parable “because...the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once” (Luke 19:11). In unmistakable language He said He had to go “to a distant country [heaven] to have himself appointed king and then to return” (19:12). Later in the parable “He was made king...and returned home” (19:15). How could Jesus have possibly made it clearer that *the kingdom will begin when He returns*? Of course, the servants He left behind belong to His coming kingdom (19:13-26; Col. 1:13). But not a single passage says it has already begun.

God will restore Israel. After His resurrection the Lord “appeared to [His disciples] over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). During this training “he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). At the end of this training, their understanding minds still had a question: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” His answer was that it was not for them “to know the times or dates the Father has set...” (Acts 1:6-7). So Israel will be renewed and the kingdom will be restored to them, as the question and answer implied. God knows when but we do not know

⁶ The Lord’s explanation of “The Wheat and the Tares” parable (Matt. 13:24) serves as a model for the other parables. For the first time He began, “The kingdom of heaven is like...” That 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.

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

when. Meanwhile, they are like “branches broken off” from their own tree (Romans 11:17-21). “Did they stumble...beyond recovery? Not at all” (11:11). They are still God’s chosen people: “God did not reject his people, which he foreknew [that is, chose]” (11:2). Continuing to speak of that nation, Paul says, “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (11:29). “So all Israel will be saved, as it is written” (11:26). When they are finally restored, it will be “life from the dead” (11:15).

For more discussion of Matthew 12:28, see Appendix A on page 18.

So what does Matthew 12:28 mean? I have been showing that Jesus did not intend to establish His kingdom at His first advent. Bring it near but not establish it. What, then, is the meaning of Matthew 12:28: “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you”? Of the scores of Gospel statements about the kingdom, this is the only one some teachers cite. Most such teachers assume that “has come upon” means “has begun.” But we must remember that the kingdom was still being preached as near (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9, 11). As you saw earlier, that verb never means actual arrival. Therefore, the kingdom was present only in the person of the king and His representatives. In spite of His victories over the devil, Jesus did not begin to reign. That is verified in other books. The Book of Revelation, for example, shows what must happen in preparation for His coming to rule. Only at the end of a terrible tribulation (Rev. 6-18) will He come to quash His enemies (Rev. 19), bind Satan (Rev. 20:1-3), and begin the first thousand years of His reign (20:4-6).⁷ In short, the kingdom approached—and even touched earth—when Jesus was here; but it did not begin.

Fact 2. Jesus fulfilled various prophecies related to the kingdom.

For example:

- A. His ministry is summed up in Luke 4:16-21, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2a. It was “to preach good news to the poor” and “provide freedom for the prisoners.”⁸
- B. His miracles showed He can fashion a new world. They perfectly fit the OT kingdom prophecies. For example, Matthew 8-9 sketch nine scenes of Him healing, showing power, and restoring. These reflect kingdom descriptions such as in Isaiah 11 and 35. Therefore, when John the Baptist sent from prison to ask if Jesus was the coming king, Jesus’ answer was His miracles (Matt. 11:2-6).
- C. His mission was that of the predicted Servant of the Lord: “to proclaim justice to the nations” (Matt. 12:17-21). Accordingly, Matthew pictures Him as a new Moses revealing a new “law” on the mountain (Matt. 5:1, 17; Heb. 7:12). His law is also called “the new covenant,” inaugurated by Jesus’ death (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20). It was promised to Israel (Jer.

⁷ During the tribulation the devil will be hurled to earth (Rev. 12:9-10). That passage has two indications of when it will take place: (a) After Jesus’ first advent, after the one who will “rule all the nations” has been “snatched up to God and to his throne” (12:5). (b) Just before God’s rule on earth begins, for the devil “knows that his time is short” (12:12).

⁸ Many have rightly noticed Jesus’ strange citation from Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18-19. He read to “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isa. 61:2a) but did not continue with “the day of vengeance” (61:2b). It was not time to fulfill that part.

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

31:31) but is already effective for all believers (2 Cor. 3:6, 17-18). As “the law of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:2), it transforms all who believe. As “the eternal covenant” (Heb. 13:20), it is essential to the final kingdom.

D. His main achievements will endure forever. Consider two already noted under Definitions:

- Eternal life is usually spoken of as future but is also present (John 5:24, 28-29).
- He is not only perfectly endowed with the Holy Spirit but also grants Him to every believer. The Spirit administers the new covenant and will always do so (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

SOME ARGUE that fulfilling such prophecies inaugurated the kingdom.

INSTEAD, He did His miracles to demonstrate that He is the Messiah. (I will discuss His present Messiahship in Facts 4 and 5.) If He had actually inaugurated the kingdom, the same miracles would have continued. They would have produced what Jesus called “the renewal of all things” (Matt. 19:28). But that renewal, He said, will take place “when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne.” This does not deny that He already grants down payments, such as the assurance of eternal life, the Spirit, and the new covenant. But down payments are not the complete reality, the kingdom itself. Even the day of judgment, which John the Baptist saw as imminent (Matt. 3:10, 12), will not come until Messiah returns in glory.

(The next two facts refer to the message in Acts 2, with which the church began. For analysis of that message, see Appendix B on page 20.)

Fact 3. The New Testament relates Jesus' first advent to “the last days.”

- A. Peter explained the tongues-speaking at Pentecost as resulting from God's gift of the Holy Spirit predicted for “the last days.” In Acts 2:16-21 Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32, changing Joel's time indication “afterward” to “in the last days.” Joel's prophecy added that there would be wonders and signs “before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord” (Acts 2:19-20). Similarly, Hebrews 1:1-2 contrasts “the past,” when God spoke through “the prophets” to “these last days” [lit., the end of these days], when “He has spoken...by His Son.”
- B. Galatians 4:4 (King James Version) dates Jesus' first advent at “the fullness of times.” This is similar to an expression in Ephesians 1:10: God will “bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” when “the times will have reached their fulfillment.”
- C. Second Corinthians 6:2 calls this “the day of salvation.”
- D. Hebrews 2:5-18 calls the kingdom “the world to come” that believers will inherit. And it says that Christ is already “crowned with glory and honor” (2:9).

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

SOME ARGUE that such passages prove that the last days have begun, from which they infer that the final kingdom must have begun, too.⁹

INSTEAD, such passages teach at most that some of the final things have begun, such as, the granting of God's Holy Spirit. However, most final things have not begun (see Definitions and Chart A). Fulfillments of a few of them do not amount to the kingdom. Some NT passages do seem to put us in the last days or last time (e.g., 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1?; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 18). But some do not. For example, 1 Peter 1:5 says we "are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (cf. the future "last day" in John 6:39-54; 11:24; 12:48). It seems logical that the last days began when Jesus first appeared but long before the kingdom arrives. Consider the following evidence that final times have not arrived.

- Some things predicted for "the last days" have not happened. Both Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3, for example, assure us that "in the last days...all nations will stream to...the house of the God of Jacob [in Jerusalem]...so that [they] may walk in his paths...Nation will not take up sword against nation." None of that has happened in its obvious meaning. (See also Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14; Hos. 3:5.) Neither has much been fulfilled in the prophecy Peter partly cited from Joel 2. The question asked by the Jews and the answer by Peter both referred primarily to the miraculous speaking in tongues. That was produced by the same gift of the Spirit that will characterize the end times.¹⁰ Yet, fulfillment of one main feature (realized eschatology) guarantees the whole prophecy.
- The Day of the Lord has not come. During that Day the kingdom will begin (see Zech. 14:1-9, 16). When Peter quoted Joel about the gift of the Spirit, he proceeded to quote the promise of celestial signs before the Day of the Lord (Acts 2:19-20). If those signs are literal, they surely have not occurred and that Day has not come. Even if they are figures of speech, they must refer to major changes still future. The apostle Paul spent considerable effort in the Thessalonian Epistles to prove that the Day of the Lord has not arrived (see especially 1 Thess. 5:1-4; 2 Thess. 2:1-8). "That day will not come until" other events happen first.¹¹

⁹ Moore (in *The Kingdom, op. cit.*) uses some of these biblical phrases to prove a realized kingdom.

The New Testament writers speak of the salvation in Christ as the inbreaking of the eschaton, the arrival of the promised last days (Luke 2:26-32). Jesus Himself ties entrance into the eschatological Kingdom to a "looking" specifically at Him in faith...[T]he apostolic message was that the decisive, apocalyptic Day of the Lord had arrived in the identity and mission of Jesus..." (p. 112).

Moore is correct to state that in the NT "salvation is seen, holistically, in terms of a bodily resurrection, the reversal of the Edenic curse, and the restoration of humanity as vicegerents [sic] of the created order" (p. 111). In other words, salvation is the kingdom. But as I will show, to imply that it has already come (and we already rule) takes realized eschatology too far.

¹⁰ The amazed Jews who "came together in bewilderment" (Acts 2:6) had "asked one another, 'What does this mean?'" (2:12). By "this" they referred to the supernatural evidence they saw and heard—above all, the speaking in tongues. By the same word in his answer, Peter referred to the same thing: "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (2:16). Peter did not claim that all of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled, only "this" (gift of the Spirit) that they asked about.

¹¹ In my "[Thessalonians](#)" study look up my comments on 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3. In each passage the apostle denies explicitly that the Day of the Lord has come.

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

The apostle Peter continued with the same perspective. In his last chapter he reminded us of the Lord's "coming" (*parousia*) that He "promised" in order to purify us (2 Peter 3:2, 4, 9, 11, 13, 14). That coming seems to have been delayed. But it will surely happen, as part of "the Day of the Lord." That Day "will come like a thief" (3:10) and "in keeping with [God's] promise" in Isaiah 65 will result in "a new heaven and a new earth" (3:13). In that Day there will be celestial signs: "the heavens will disappear...the elements will melt..." (3:10, 12). Peter was not describing events a thousand years after the Lord's return but those we "look forward to" at any time (3:12, 13, 14).

- We are still in "this age" as contrasted to "the age to come." Jesus clearly put final judgment in the latter (Matt. 12:32). Years later the apostle Paul continued to contrast the same two ages (Eph. 1:21).
- "The world to come" (Heb. 2:5), which is still "to come," is the kingdom. In it everything will be subject to man, not to angels; but "at present we do not see everything subject to him" (2:8). We do "see Jesus...now crowned...[and] bringing many sons to [that promised] glory" (2:9-10). He is preparing us to share in the kingdom. But nothing says He is already ruling.¹²

Fact 4. The New Testament relates Jesus' resurrection and ascension to His ruling.

- A. Acts 2 explains that King David predicted both those events based on knowing God's promise (in 2 Sam. 7:14) that David's Son (Messiah) would sit on David's throne.
1. Messiah would rise from the dead before His body decayed (Acts 2:30-31, after citing Ps. 16:8-11).
 2. Messiah would be exalted to God's right hand (Acts 2:33-35, citing Ps. 110:1). That is "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given" (Eph. 1:21).
- B. Jesus' resurrection
1. shows that God has appointed Him king (Acts 13:32-33; Rom. 1:3-4) and judge (Acts 10:42).
 2. makes Him the firstfruits from the dead for all His people (1 Cor. 15:20). This guarantees their own victory over death (15:21-23) and inheriting the kingdom (15:50).
- C. Jesus' giving the Holy Spirit is a kingdom function (Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:27; 37:13-14), symbolized by the "living water" pictured in Zechariah 14:8-9 (cf. John 7:38). The Spirit is "a seal...deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14).

¹² It seems obvious that Ephesians 1:10 (quoted earlier) looks to the kingdom as future. God will "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" when "the times will have reached their fulfillment."

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

SOME ARGUE that if Jesus has been designated or appointed as king in His resurrection, He must be ruling. Sitting beside God on His throne implies His ruling with God; giving the Spirit proves it.

INSTEAD, His sitting at God's right hand guarantees that He will eventually sit on His own throne and rule forever in the coming kingdom. That is exactly what is implied by the words of Psalm 110:1 cited by Peter in Acts 2:33-35: "Sit at my right hand *until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.*" He is still sitting beside His Father and still waiting to rule. The final process of subduing his enemies and coming again is described in Revelation chapters 6-19. From then on He will occupy "the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). Scripture never confuses David's throne on earth with God's throne of the universe in heaven. Instead, Psalm 89 clearly distinguishes them (David's throne in 89:4, 29, 36, 44; God's throne in v. 14). So does the Lord Jesus in Revelation 3:21, speaking of "my throne" and "my Father on his throne."

Nevertheless, Jesus is already the king: "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5). He "was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:4, NET Bible. See my "[Survey of Romans](#)"). He is certainly the king, and we acknowledge Him as such (Acts 17:7).

Yet, there can be a long interval between being appointed and actually ruling. That was the case for King David. He was first anointed "in the presence of his brothers" (1 Sam. 16:13). Yet, for years he did not inherit his throne at all! Instead, he had to run for his life, accompanied by members of his future kingdom. After Saul died, David was anointed again, to rule over Judah (2 Sam. 2:4). More than seven years after that, he was anointed yet again, to rule over all the tribes (2 Sam. 5:1-5). So it is obvious that David ministered to those who followed him, and they obeyed him, long before his kingdom began. The same thing is true in Jesus' case. He is the *designated* king and judge, who will eventually *function* as such.¹³ And while He waits, He builds His kingdom community by "baptizing in" (permanently granting) the Holy Spirit. This is realized eschatology which guarantees the coming kingdom.¹⁴

Fact 5. The New Testament designates Jesus as having royal titles.

For example, He is

- Messiah (Luke 23:2, 35; Acts 2:36; 5:42)
- King (Luke 23:2, 38; Acts 17:7)
- Son of God (His heir, Matt. 3:17; 21:37-38)
- Lord/Master (Phil. 2:9-11; Rom. 10:9-10)

¹³ Waiting to rule after being designated to rule is not unique to David. For example, consider the "twenty-four elders [with] crowns of gold on their heads" that John saw in heaven (Rev. 4:4). Crowned but waiting to rule. In the most likely Greek reading, they are included among the redeemed of 5:9-10 who "will reign on the earth."

¹⁴ By His death Jesus has already won the great battle over His enemies. "Now is the time for judgment on this world," He predicted; "Now the prince of this world will be driven out" (John 12:31). Because of this great victory, His ascension to God's throne was similar to God's ascension to Mt. Zion back in David's time. Therefore, Ephesians 4:8 applies Psalm 68:18 (with changes) to Jesus: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5)
Judge (Acts 10:42)
Head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23)
Shepherd (John 10:14; Heb. 13:20)
Head of principalities and powers (Col. 1:18; 2:10)

SOME ARGUE that such titles imply that Jesus is ruling.

INSTEAD, an elected person can gain titles—and have close followers—before entering office. In Jesus' case His present relationship to His followers is like David's before he ruled. (See under Fact 4.) Take one example. Acts 10:42 says that Jesus is “the one whom God appointed as judge.” But when the apostle Paul discusses that subject, he shows that judgment still awaits “the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom. 2:5). Again, “This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ” (2:16). Having the title does not imply its present exercise.

Fact 6. The church is related to God's kingdom.

- A. The church's name *ekklesia* means it is the kingdom assembly and will have kingdom authority. See Matthew 16:18-19 and OT usage (e.g., Deut. 9:10).
- B. The church is called a kingdom (Rev. 1:6).
- C. Believers have been “brought [KJV, translated]...into the kingdom” (Col. 1:13).

SOME ARGUE that this is more than a hope for the future; the kingdom has begun spiritually.

INSTEAD, the kingdom will be our marvelous inheritance when we become imperishable in the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:50). We will reign along with Messiah (2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17). The apostle spoke with deep sarcasm to the Corinthians, who acted as though the kingdom had already begun: “Already you have become rich. You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!” (1 Cor. 4:8).

As the apostle rightly implies, how pathetic is our kingdom if this is it! We can't even count on being healed, as they could when the kingdom was near at the Lord's first coming. The truth is that we can be called the kingdom only in embryonic form, legally but not yet in fact. Heirs who have not yet inherited. “What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). We shall “inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him” (James 2:5). Eschatology already realized assures us of our share in that kingdom.

Fact 7. The church fulfills some promises to Israel.

- A. Since Messiah is Abraham's heir and the true Israel, we who are *in Messiah* share the same inheritance with Him (Gal. 3:16, 29; Rom. 8:17; cf. Eph. 5:5).
- B. We "Gentiles by birth" now share Israel's promises. We who were "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God... have been brought near" (Eph. 2:11-13). Messiah began accepting Gentiles as Gentiles. Thus, He made "one new man out of the two...one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross" (2:15-16). Nowhere does He mention separate covenants or separate promises for this new body.
- C. The same terminology previously used of Israel in view of their becoming God's kingdom is now true of us. We are called "a chosen people...a holy nation...the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

SOME ARGUE that if even Gentiles are heirs in Messiah, one body with Israel and fulfilling promises made to Israel, the kingdom must have started.

INSTEAD, our inheritance is still future and basically the same for all, although Israel will remain unique.

- A future inheritance. The kingdom we will inherit with God's Son, the Messiah, has not come yet. Notice how the Father described it when He promised, "I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter..." (Ps. 2:8, 9a). The Son did not get that rule at His first coming but pictured it for the future. When He finally "comes in his glory," He foresaw, "he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory" (Matt. 25:31). That is when He will invite His people to "take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you..." (25:34).
- The same inheritance. We Gentiles were "brought near" to Israel and to its same "covenants of promise" and "hope" (Eph. 2:11-13). There could be nothing better. We "will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; cf. Eph. 5:5) described by the prophets. It drew near when Jesus did its mighty works—but was "postponed." Now "he must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21). Meanwhile, Jesus is building His *ekklesia* for that kingdom. It has no unique covenants or promises but had "mysteries" (previously unrevealed secrets; Eph. 23). Apostles learned that Gentiles *as such* are accepted into the "one new man," the "one body" of Messiah, now "reconciled to God."¹⁵

¹⁵ The "mystery" was not the fact that there will be a kingdom assembly (*ekklesia*). That was anticipated, for example, in Psalm 22:22, quoted in Hebrews 2:12. The mystery was the composition of the *ekklesia*, that Gentiles are included as Gentiles and do not have to become Jews: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Messiah Jesus" (Eph. 3:6).

For further study of the church as a supposed "mystery," see my writing "[Will God Eternally Bless Ethnic Israel? A Critique of 'Replacement Theology'.](#)" It has a special section called "The Church Was Not a Secret."

- Israel unique. Sharing Israel's honor and hope doesn't make us Israel or annul God's peculiar promises (Rom. 9:4). The term still applies only to that nation. God will save it and fulfill those promises (Rom. 11:12, 15, 23, 24, 26-27, 29, 31). There will be only one kingdom but many different shares (Luke 19:17, 19). Israel will inherit its shares—and other nations will inherit their own shares (Rev. 21:24-26; 22:2).

Part III. Conclusions

1. To a certain degree Jesus achieved realized eschatology. He achieved some final things long before the end of the ages. This began during His ministry, when He preached that the kingdom had drawn near and proved it by His works. His works showed that He had the power and wisdom to bring the prophesied kingdom. Here are some of His lasting results that we call realized eschatology. They make it evident that the kingdom can and will come just as predicted.

- He demonstrated that He is the anointed king, the one who will change the world, the object of saving faith.
- He did (and enabled His followers to do) miracles by which people “tasted...the powers of the coming age” (Heb. 6:5).
- By letting Israel reject Him, He also let them offer Him as the sacrifice that can reconcile all believers to God.
- By dying as a sacrifice, He inaugurated the eternal new covenant (His new law), which He now administers from heaven as priest.
- He now forgives each new believer and gives him the Holy Spirit forever.
- By thus “baptizing” in the Spirit, He builds His kingdom assembly, the *ekklesia* (church), which is His body.
- By His death, resurrection, and ascension He has guaranteed the ultimate destruction of the devil and the coming of the eternal kingdom.

2. The promised kingdom is not yet inaugurated. Here are some of the lines of evidence.

- Several key aspects of the kingdom have *not* been realized, aspects often repeated by the prophets. These include the redemption of Israel, nations living in peace and justice, the public rule of Messiah from a glorified Jerusalem, and freedom from the worldwide curse. If we insist that the kingdom began anyhow, we must drastically redefine (“spiritualize”) it. As a result, scores of prophecies become hopelessly confusing.
- If Jesus was inaugurating a merely spiritual kingdom, we cannot explain the type and temporary nature of His (and His apostles’) miracles. (a) Why did those miracles mostly correct *material* problems if He was starting a spiritual kingdom? (b) If the miracles were inaugurating the kingdom, why did they cease?
- In spite of claiming that the kingdom was near (and even present in His person), Jesus often promised it for later instead. For example, when explaining kingdom parables, He first referred to it in connection with the judgment at “the end of the age” (Matt. 13:39-43). And on several later occasions He spoke of coming back in glory to sit on His throne and rule (e.g., Matt. 19:28-29; 25:31).

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

- Several terms designating the final epochs of history still referred to the future: “the Day of the Lord,” “the age to come,” “the world to come.” These terms either included or meant the kingdom.
- Various Scriptures say that our inheritance as Christians is the future possession of the kingdom (further discussed in conclusion 3). Those who claim that the kingdom has begun imply that we already have our inheritance. If that were so, we would have every right to be disappointed!

3. What difference does it make if we believe the kingdom began? The same kind of difference as anything else God emphasizes. We change God's meanings at our own peril—and that of our family and of all to whom we minister. I will now list some of the bad results already widespread from thinking Messiah's kingdom has begun. That belief has the following tendencies.

- It makes us lose confidence in God's OT Word (at least our ability to understand it). That is because scores of prophecies must be reinterpreted to mean other than what they say.
- It adds confusion when we read the NT. That is because we must constantly decide whether the kingdom is the alleged present form or the glorious future form. Matthew alone, for example, refers to it by name over fifty times. I will give only two examples.
 - a. Consider the first and last Beatitudes that begin the Sermon on the Mount. In both Jesus promised, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3, 10). Did He mean a present kingdom or a future kingdom? (You can't tell from the verb “is.” Though present tense, it could refer to a future kingdom that was near and immense.)
 - b. Sometimes He spoke of His kingdom as clearly future, to begin when He returns to rule (e.g., Matt. 25:31). But most often its time was ambiguous. For example, once His disciples asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matt. 18:1). Did they think of it as present or future? His answer favors the future: “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom” (18:2). That would mean the same as “to enter life” in the next verses (18:8, 9; cf. 19:16, 17). Yet, some teach that He was requiring humility to enter an alleged present spiritual kingdom.¹⁶

In such passages the only reason there is ambiguity is because there is supposedly a present form of the kingdom. But if there really were two forms, why wouldn't the Scriptures ever distinguish them?

- It diverts our attention from the Lord's future triumph to the present. Each reference to His kingdom should make us think of the future and of Messiah's coming back to rule. When we think of the present instead, we miss the main point. God gave us many such reminders in the first three Gospels, the foundation for other NT books. He wants us to be future oriented at every such reference. But present-kingdom thinking goes counter to God's plan; its proponents interpret as present every reference they can.
- It makes us lose track of our goal, which is to inherit with our Lord in His coming kingdom on earth. Consider the example of the Beatitudes, mentioned above (Matt. 5:3-12). Was He

¹⁶ I had the privilege of studying under dispensationalist John Walvoord. In classes he used to explain Matthew 18:1-4 as requiring external humility to enter what he called the present “sphere of profession.” Really? That missed the meanings of both the requirement and the goal.

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

promising us a kingdom we receive now or one we will receive later? In this age or in the coming age? It makes a lot of difference. If it is still future (as are the six promises in verses 4-9), we must look forward patiently. If it is present, it is certainly a disappointing reward!

In fact, it has become common now to think that we reach our goal when we go to heaven at death (or in the Rapture). That aspiration sees little importance in bodily resurrection, which for many seems nice but relatively unnecessary. (Why would we need a physical body in a spiritual environment?) Yet, resurrection was the essence of the NT message (Acts 23:7; 24:21; 26:6-8), because the goal is the future kingdom.

- It leads us to revise the gospel itself. The Gospels and Acts share the huge biblical emphasis on Jesus' right to rule, which is the meaning of *Messiah* and *Son of God*. By far the most common summary of the gospel is the one the apostles "day after day...never stopped teaching and proclaiming...that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 5:42). Nowadays that message is rarely preached,¹⁷ partly because many think He is already ruling. But if this is already His kingdom, we cannot help but be disappointed. The reality falls far short of the promises.
- It discredits Israel—and Spirit-inspired prophecies about Israel. A great many interpreters think that the hopes of godly Israelites, such as spoken in Luke 1-2, were naive and uninformed. Just as often, they show scorn for the apostles' question in Acts 1:6, which asked if the Lord was about "to restore the kingdom to Israel."
- It makes us assume that partially fulfilled prophecies have been wholly fulfilled.

4. Why is it better to understand that we are still waiting for the kingdom? Because as God's main goal of the centuries, the kingdom is the center of all His revelation and Messiah's inheritance. Seeing it as the certain future provides the proper foundation for all faith and action.

- We will read the many prophecies confident that they mean what they say, with no need of "experts" to interpret them in general.
- We will keep our mind on the Lord's coming triumph and what we can and should do continually in preparation.
- We will give importance to related teachings the Bible emphasizes, such as, bodily resurrection.
- We will appreciate and communicate the prime importance of Jesus' being Messiah/King and the things He will save us *for*, not just what He will save us *from*.¹⁸
- We will pray for the peace of Jerusalem, Messiah's coming capital, and the restoration of His chosen people Israel.
- We will be confident that partial fulfillments guarantee the whole!

¹⁷ The Book of Acts shows that apostolic gospel preaching was primarily "Jesus is the Messiah." See my "[Evangelistic Sermons in Acts](#)." How often have you heard anyone preach that? Instead, we preach that He is the virgin-born One from heaven who became a man to die for our sins. Those are great and important facts that Acts sermons *do not mention!* Have we really learned a better approach than the one used by the apostles?

¹⁸ If we reject the Scriptural witness about Jesus and His kingdom, we will replace it with faulty notions. See Appendix A on p. 18.

Appendix A: Matthew 12:28 & Realized Eschatology

This appendix reflects some of my critique of Clayton Sullivan's Rethinking Realized Eschatology (Mercer University Press, 1988). He reveals many flaws in current Realized Eschatology but comes to a most disappointing conclusion.

Do the Gospels affirm that Jesus inaugurated His kingdom in an unexpected, spiritual form? If we judge by the books being published, a majority now answer Yes. Following the lead of C. H. Dodd, many call that view “Realized Eschatology.”¹⁹ Clayton Sullivan shows that in alleging an inaugurated kingdom, Dodd and followers twist some Scriptures and neglect many more. Here are some of Sullivan’s main points (giving his page numbers):

- He shows how flimsy the “Two-Document Hypothesis” is, on the basis of which Dodd justified avoiding many Scriptures (pp. 13-36).
- He criticizes Dodd’s “slippery use of language” in redefining *basileia* (Greek for “kingdom”) with practically no basis (pp. 37-64).
- He refutes Dodd’s specific biblical arguments that the kingdom had come (pp. 65-99). Dodd used only six Scriptures with parallels, above all Matthew 12:28 (pp. 74-83).
- In an appendix (pp. 127-140) he quotes many patristic writers. His summary: “The conception of the Kingdom as both a place and a future hope dominated Christian thought until the time of Augustine. Augustine’s contribution was the identification of the Kingdom with the Church” (p. 140).

Matthew 12:28. This was Dodd’s most “crucial passage,” the favorite proof text of his kind of Realized Eschatology. Sullivan deals with it at length.

“If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God,
then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Of the scores of Gospel statements about the kingdom, this is the only one some teachers cite. Sullivan shows that Dodd quite misunderstood it. First, Dodd wrongly insisted that the Greek verb here translated “has come upon” means “has begun.” Not so, as you can see in 1 Thessalonians 2:16, where the same form of the same verb is used in the same syntax. There it refers not to the beginning of God’s wrath on a wicked nation but to its *imminence* (about to come). So the context must determine in what sense something has arrived. In the case of the kingdom, we should remember that it was constantly being preached as having *drawn near* (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7), even during the last journey to Jerusalem (Luke 10:9, 11). And although some interpreters desperately want “draw near” to mean “arrive,” it never means that (see James 5:8; 1 Peter 4:7).

In Matthew 12:28 Dodd also redefined the meaning of the Greek word *basileia*. He denied that it had its usual meaning “kingdom.” Instead, it meant an abstract power—not a realm in time and space but Jesus’ ability to cast out the devil. Trying to establish that meaning, Dodd (like many after him) had to be extremely selective. He had to avoid scores of relevant Gospel pas-

¹⁹ C. H. Dodd wrote many books giving his views on the kingdom. The seminal work, most often quoted by Sullivan, is *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1935).

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

sages that show otherwise, that in the *basileia* people will sit at the table to eat and drink, will observe the Passover, etc. Dodd argued that the “Two-Document Hypothesis,” quite popular when he wrote, justified his choices of Scriptures.

In Matthew 12:28 Dodd also ignored both sentence structure and context. That sentence is a first-class condition, which assumes as true that God's Spirit was the agency by which Jesus cast out demons. Thus He answered the Jewish allegation in the context that He was in league with Satan. Dodd's view that the agency was the kingdom as he defined it fits neither grammar nor context.

So in what sense had the kingdom “come upon” them? Sullivan decides that the verse is “a hyperbolic pronouncement of the imminence and certainty of the Kingdom's arrival” (p. 82). I recommend a much better interpretation: *The kingdom was present (only) in the person of the king*. In spite of His victories over the devil, Jesus did not begin to rule. Repeatedly He promised He would later “come in his glory and...sit on his throne in heavenly glory” (Matt. 25:31; cf. 19:28). That futurity is verified in other books. The Book of Revelation, for example, shows what must happen in preparation for His coming to rule. Only at the end of a terrible tribulation (Rev. 6-18) will He come to quash His enemies (Rev. 19), bind Satan (Rev. 20:1-3), and begin the first thousand years of His reign (20:4-6).

Sullivan's sad final conclusion. I agree to Sullivan's objections and part of his conclusion. In four chapters he demolishes Dodd's arguments for an inaugurated kingdom. He shows that the Gospels and the early church defined the kingdom just as the OT did. He rightly concludes that both Jesus and the church looked for the same kind of kingdom as predicted. So far, so good. But at this point he goes astray. He says Jesus and the church expected the kingdom to come immediately but—and he regrets to say it—they were mistaken! This leads Sullivan to a different form of Realized Eschatology, one which does not depend on Scriptures!

If we reject the Scriptural witness about Jesus and His kingdom, we will replace it with faulty notions. Sullivan decides that Scriptures present a Jesus and a church who were wrong, who expected the kingdom to come immediately. So he rejects those Scriptures as written—and that Jesus and kingdom as described. In his last chapter he redefines Realized Eschatology (pp. 101-112). Not Scriptures, he says, but our experience has shown us that Jesus Himself is God's revelation of ultimate significance (eschatology). Not a “Jesus who never made a mistake and who was thousands of years ahead of his time.” It doesn't matter, he says, that Jesus' “proclamation turned out to be an error [caused because He] experienced historical relativism.” No, because He was “transformed by the power of God into the Risen Lord of Christian devotion” (pp. 117-118)! In other words, Sullivan thinks he accepts the Christ presented by the Church in the Scriptures and witnessed to by the Fathers—but *not as they present Him*. That makes Sullivan's object of worship an idol.

Appendix B: Peter’s Sermon in Acts 2

The Beginning of the Church

The occasion for the sermon. Jesus had risen from the dead and given His disciples “many convincing proofs that he was alive” (Acts 1:3a). He had “appeared to them over a period of forty days,” instructing them “about the kingdom of God” (1:3b). He had told them to wait in Jerusalem until He would baptize them in the Holy Spirit (1:4-5). (Peter later equated that with “the Holy Spirit...had come on us” and “the gift [God] gave us” [11:15-17].) That promise, made through John the Baptist, was recorded in all four Gospels (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). With the stage set, Jesus had ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11). He will stay there “until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago” (Acts 3:21).

So the apostles and other disciples were in Jerusalem on the morning of the feast of Pentecost. They were mostly Galileans. With the sound of a “violent wind” and the appearance of “tongues of fire,” the Spirit of God came on them from heaven (2:1-3). Then they began “declaring the wonders of God” in languages they had not learned (2:4-11), often called “speaking in tongues.” Jews from every nation gathered, wondering what “this” supernatural evidence, especially the tongues-speaking, all meant (2:5-13). Then the apostle Peter explained.

Peter’s procedure. He first explained the meaning of “this” that they saw and heard. It was God’s giving His Spirit, as promised in Joel 2 (Acts 2:14-21) and leading to the Day of the Lord. Then he gave witness that Jesus’ works (2:22), His resurrection (2:23-32), and His ascension (2:33-35) all fulfilled divine prophecies. They are evidence that God has constituted Jesus as the promised Messiah (King) and Lord (Master) (2:36). Peter concluded with an invitation and warning, to which many responded (2:38-41).

Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32. Peter explained what was happening: “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). **It was the same gift though not the same occasion.** In Joel God promised to give His Spirit to His people Israel “afterward” (Joel 2:28). After what? After He sees them threatened with extinction and “will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people” (Joel 2:18). After He destroys “the northern army” that will have attacked them (2:26).²⁰ After He thus marvelously rescues, restores, and exalts His people (2:28-32). All that in “the day of the Lord” (2:31). So He will fulfill Joel’s prophecy as a whole—and grant His Spirit to converted Israel—when the time comes to inaugurate His kingdom. But that which He will later do for them, He has already begun for us. Pentecost gave an earlier fulfillment of which Joel was not informed. Like all OT prophets, he saw Messiah’s two advents as one (1 Peter 1:10-12).

There are other reasons the Joel passage was appropriate. (1) It reminded Israel that the gift of the Spirit precedes the often-predicted Day of the Lord. During that period God will establish His kingdom but not before great darkness and distress (Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:14-18). (2) It tells how to be saved from God’s judgment, by calling on His name.

²⁰ Some think that the invasion of Joel 2:15-17 happened in Joel’s time. If so, it has a double reference. Its future occurrence will be immediately followed by Israel’s final restoration and exaltation. Joel chapter 3 again returns to that final battle (“in those days and at that time”).

Realized Eschatology: Evidence that Christ's Kingdom Is Coming

To repeat, Peter quoted Joel to explain that Jesus the Messiah has begun baptizing in the Spirit. What does Messiah achieve by that? He thus imparts God's life to each believer, making him a member of Messiah's "body." In this way He builds His kingdom community (the *ekklesia*), as He promised when His apostles confessed Him to be Messiah (Matt. 16:16-18).

The Sermon Itself

Peter explained how they were enabled to speak in tongues (2:14-21). This was not drunkenness, as some thought who didn't understand the disciples' words (2:15). Instead, it resulted from the gift of the Holy Spirit as predicted by the prophet Joel (2:16). In Acts 2:17-21 Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 (with one change) about what was happening.

"[I]n the last days" (Joel, "afterward") God would

(a) pour out the Holy Spirit on all...

who would prophesy, see visions, dream dreams (2:17)

even on slaves (2:18)

(b) also give celestial wonders and signs (2:19-20a)

before the Day of the Lord (2:20b)²¹

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (2:21).

Peter summarized Jesus' ministry (2:22) as God's accrediting Jesus to Israel by signs. (This was the same message the Gospels were written to convey.)

Peter showed from Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah (2:23-36). As a prophet, King David predicted the death, resurrection, and ascension of his descendant the Messiah.

- Messiah's death and resurrection (2:23-32). It was God's purpose for Israel to put Jesus to death in shame (2:23). In Psalm 16 David foresaw that his descendant, the future ruler, would be resurrected before His body could be corrupted (2:24-31). Jesus' disciples are witnesses to His resurrection (2:32).
- Messiah's ascension and session (2:33-35). David also predicted, in Psalm 110, his descendant's exaltation to God's throne until God subjects His enemies to Him. From there Messiah has poured out the Holy Spirit, as Israel has seen and heard.
- The conclusion (2:36): God has made Jesus Lord (master) and Messiah (anointed ruler).

Peter issued an invitation (2:38-40): Repent and be baptized in Jesus' name to be forgiven, receive the Holy Spirit, and be saved from coming judgment. About 3000 responded by being baptized (2:41).

²¹ Whether they mean changes in nature or in politics, the heavenly signs of Acts 2:19-20 have not been fulfilled. They might include those predicted for Messiah's Second Coming: "the heavens will disappear...the elements will melt..." (2 Peter 3:10, 12). Revelation 6:12 predicts using the same terms as Joel.