

## **The Coming Millennial Kingdom—Part 2**

### **An Examination of Disputed Passages Regarding the Kingdom**

#### *INTRODUCTION*

This is part two of a two-part series on *The Coming Millennial Kingdom*. In part one, we considered:

1. The Battle for the Theocratic Kingdom.
2. Some Views of the Millennial Kingdom.
3. Some Consequences of Erroneous Views.

In this paper, we will examine some disputed passages of Scripture relating to *The Coming Millennial Kingdom* which will be established in the future.

The following are some texts that “kingdom now” theologians use to support their position.

#### *PASSAGES IN THE GOSPELS*

##### **The Kingdom Is at Hand**

Early in the Gospels, we find the expression “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This message was proclaimed to the nation of Israel by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:2; Mk. 1:15), Christ (Mt. 4:17), the Twelve (Mt. 10:5–7), and the Seventy (Lk. 10:1, 9, 11). The Greek verb *engizō* is translated “near” or “at hand.” “Kingdom now” theologians understand the phrase “at hand” to mean “here” in the sense that the kingdom has already arrived. However, such an interpretation is controversial and is hardly a foregone conclusion.

The same word *engizō* is used in James 5:8–9 to say that the Lord’s coming is near. Bible scholars agree that this means that the Lord could come at any moment, not that He is already here or has arrived. So, why should we not understand the same word in the Gospels to refer to the kingdom’s imminent nearness rather than its presence or arrival?

##### **Theirs Is the Kingdom**

Both Matthew 5:3 and 5:10 say, “For theirs is (*eimi*) the kingdom of heaven (emphasis added).” Some use the present tense of the verb *eimi* to support “kingdom now” theology. They claim that a spiritual form of the kingdom was already present in Christ’s earthly ministry.

However, the other references to the kingdom in Matthew 5–6 place it in the future (Mt. 5:19 [twice], 20; 6:10, 33). In New Testament Greek, a present tense verb can be used in a futuristic manner. Daniel Wallace explains: “The present tense may be used to describe a future event, though.... it typically adds connotations of immediacy and certainty.... The present tense may describe an event that is wholly subsequent to the time of speaking, although as if it were present.”<sup>1</sup>

The present tense of the verb *eimi* is also used in 1 John 2:17, which says, “The world is passing away.” Obviously, the present tense was not used in 1 John 2:17 to indicate that the world had

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 535–36.

passed away in John's day. Rather, John used the present tense to indicate that the passing away of the world was both imminent and certain. The same argument can be applied to the phrase, "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Matthew 6:9–13 Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Some theologians claim that Christ inaugurated the kingdom in spiritual form during His First Coming. They appeal to the so-called "Lord's Prayer" to substantiate their claim.

Some have aptly stated that "The Lord's Prayer" is the wrong title for this text. Ironside noted, "Jesus Himself could not pray for it, for it includes a request for forgiveness of sins, and He was ever the Sinless One."<sup>2</sup> This prayer should really be called "the Disciples' Prayer." Jesus was teaching His disciples how to pray, and He gave them a model prayer to follow.

Dr. Stanley Toussaint explains how this prayer relates to the future kingdom, "The sample prayer, it can be concluded, is given in the context of the coming kingdom. The first three requests are petitions for the coming of the kingdom. The last three are for the needs of the disciples in the interim preceding the establishment of the kingdom."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Andy Woods concludes:

If Matthew 6:9–13 is in actuality a model prayer for the disciples consisting of three requests for the kingdom to come and three additional requests for their temporal needs to be met prior to the kingdom's establishment, then it becomes obvious that the Lord did not establish the kingdom at His First Advent. It is also obvious that the ... verses used to argue that the kingdom is present (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10) cannot be interpreted in such a manner. Otherwise, the 'Disciples' Prayer' becomes nonsensical. After all, why pray for the coming of the kingdom and make additional requests until its establishment if the kingdom were already a present reality?<sup>4</sup>

### **Seek the Kingdom**

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (cf. Lk. 12:31)

Some "kingdom now" theologians claim that these verses teach a present, spiritual form of the kingdom. However, this text cannot be used to support such a concept of the kingdom. Jesus was simply advising His disciples to make the values of the future kingdom their top priority while they live here on Earth in Satan's domain, as they wait for the future kingdom to arrive.

E. R. Craven explained the meaning of the term "kingdom" (*basileia*) found in Matthew 6:33:

The exhortations of our Lord to "seek the Kingdom of God," Mt. 6:33; Lk. 12:31. It is

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Allen Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Loizeaux, 1948), 63.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2005), 112.

<sup>4</sup> Woods, Andrew M.. *The Coming Kingdom: What Is the Kingdom and How Is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church?*. Grace Gospel Press. Kindle Edition.

manifest that both these exhortations are consistent with the hypothesis of a future Kingdom—as though He had said, So act, that when the Basileia is established you may enter it. Indeed the contexts of both exhortations require that we should put that interpretation upon them: the one in Mt. follows the direction to pray “Thy Kingdom come” (ver. 10), and that in Luke is manifestly parallel with the exhortation to wait for an absent Lord (vers. 35–40).<sup>5</sup>

Paul wrote, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20).” We are ambassadors living in this present world system. An ambassador represents the value system of his home country on foreign soil. As God’s people, we represent the values of the coming kingdom while living in this present world system (1 Jn. 5:19).

If we are living in a present, spiritual form of the kingdom now, then the term “ambassador” makes no sense. It would not make sense to act as an ambassador for the kingdom’s values in the present world if the kingdom were already a reality.

### **The Kingdom of God Has Come upon You**

Mt. 12:28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. (cf. Lk. 11:20)

Some “kingdom now” theologians interpret this to mean that Jesus inaugurated a spiritual form of the Messianic kingdom during His First Coming. However, this view fails to understand that Jesus offered the kingdom to first-century Israel, but they rejected that offer. The kingdom was offered to the nation by John the Baptist, Christ, and the disciples. That offer was rejected by Israel’s national leaders and as a result, it was postponed.

Eventually, the kingdom will be re-offered to the nation and accepted by them at the end of the future Tribulation period. Jesus referred to that time in Matthew 23:39 when He said, “you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” This is a quotation of Psalm 118:26 which is a messianic Psalm. Jesus was speaking of His return to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom. When the nation of Israel acknowledges Jesus as their messianic King, then the Davidic Kingdom will be established. At that time, Israel will be grafted back into the olive tree and so all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:23, 26).

Certainly, the kingdom had come upon first century Israel in the sense that the King was standing in their midst offering them the kingdom that was promised by the Old Testament prophets. However, their rejection of the King resulted in their temporary forfeiture of the kingdom at that time. The kingdom was certainly not inaugurated by Jesus in Matthew 12.

### **The Kingdom Is Within You**

Luke 17:20–21 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

This is a key proof text used by “kingdom now” theologians to argue that a spiritual form of the kingdom exists today.

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<sup>5</sup> E. R. Craven, “*Excursus on the Basileia*,” in *Revelation of John*, J. P. Lange (New York: Scribner, 1874), 95.

In this text, Jesus was addressing the Pharisees. We could legitimately ask, “how could the kingdom be within the satanically empowered Pharisees? In the Gospel of John, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil (Jn. 8:44).” Since the Pharisees were plotting to murder Christ, it seems highly unlikely that the kingdom was within them. Also, God’s Word tells us that people enter the kingdom (Mt. 5:20; 23:13; Jn. 3:5). Nowhere are we told that the kingdom enters people.

If Luke 17:20–21 implies that a spiritual form of the kingdom was already in existence at that time, then why do subsequent verses depict a future kingdom? For example:

- Matthew 19:28 So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
- Matthew 26:29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.”
- Luke 23:42 Then he (the thief on the cross) said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”
- Acts 1:6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Several translations render Luke 17:21 as the kingdom of God “is in your midst,” “in the midst of you” or “is among you.” See: ESV, HCSB, LEB, NASB, NET, and NLT. Such translations seem like a better rendering of what Jesus said.

### **Entering the Kingdom**

John 3:3–5 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

The word “kingdom” (*basileia*) is used twice in these verses. However, this text says nothing about the establishment of the kingdom. The only thing that Jesus reveals to Nicodemus is how a person must enter the kingdom. Entrance into the kingdom will only be granted to those who have been born again spiritually.

Clayton Sullivan observes, “Because in these verses the Kingdom is not dealt with extensively, it is impossible to use such references to reach a meaningful understanding of the *basileia*.”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus appears to be surprised that Nicodemus, this teacher of Israel, did not understand the new birth is a requirement for entrance into the kingdom. Nicodemus should have been aware of the prophecy in Ezekiel 36:24–27. The prophet explained what the Lord would do in that day:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you.”

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<sup>6</sup> Clayton Sullivan, *Rethinking Realized Eschatology* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1988), 127.

In this prophecy, Ezekiel explained the requirement of the new birth for entrance into the future kingdom. Ezekiel's prediction is in the context of an extended prophecy of the end times — chapters 33–48. The overall context relates to Israel's future restoration and reunification (Ezk. 36–37), the Gog and Magog battle leading to the nation's restoration (Ezk. 38–39), the millennial temple (Ezk. 40–46), the millennial river (Ezk. 47:1–12), the millennial land inheritance of Israel's tribes (Ezk. 47:13–48:29), and the ultimate restoration of Jerusalem (Ezk. 48:30–35).

When Jesus used the word “kingdom” in John 3:3–5, He presumed that Nicodemus should have understood the end times context of Ezekiel's prophecy. In John's Gospel, the context of the new birth relates to the arrival of the kingdom in the last days.

### **Arrival of the Kingdom**

Matthew 16:27–28 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

This is a key text for “kingdom now” theologians to argue that the kingdom was established before the death of the disciples. After all, Jesus said that there were some listening to Him who would not die until they saw the coming of His kingdom.

At first glance, this sounds like a reasonable argument. However, there is a better explanation of what Jesus meant by this statement.

Dr. Andy Woods explains:

Matthew 17:1–13 describes Christ's Transfiguration, where Christ appeared in His glorified state. Since this glorified manifestation of Himself was a temporary appearance during His First Advent, His Transfiguration was a foretaste or a token of what the Son of Man coming in His glory and the splendor of His kingdom, as depicted in Matthew 16:28, would be like. Thus, contextually, in Matthew 16:28, Christ predicted that the Transfiguration would take place before some of His immediate audience had died. Christ's prediction in this regard was literally fulfilled six days later when the Transfiguration took place as recorded in the very next chapter.<sup>7</sup>

We should not forget that the chapter divisions in the Bible are not part of the original text. They were added much later to organize and outline the biblical text. They are not inspired by God. In many cases, they are helpful. In some cases, they obscure the text. This is one of those cases.

E. R. Craven explains the full context of Matthew 16:28:

The declaration of Jesus, “There be some standing here,” etc., Mt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27. This, according to the opinion of Chrysostom and others (see Lange Comm. on Mt. 16:28), may find its fulfillment in the immediately following Transfiguration. In this event the *Basileia* was not merely symbolized, but in all its glory was for a moment set up on earth (comp. 2 Peter 1:16–18).<sup>8</sup>

Alva McClain adds, “the conjunction with which chapter 17 begins clearly establishes the unbroken continuity of thought between 16:28 and 17:1, as also in the accounts of Mark and

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<sup>7</sup> Woods. *The Coming Kingdom*.

<sup>8</sup> Craven, “*Excursus*,” 96.

Luke where no chapter division occurs.”<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Ice also demonstrates the continuity of thought between the two chapters:

All three accounts of the prophesied event speak of seeing and the kingdom. Matthew says they will see “the Son of Man coming in His kingdom,” emphasizing the person of the Son of Man coming. Mark says, “they see the kingdom of God” and he adds that it will come “with power.” Luke simply says that “they see the kingdom of God.” The transfiguration fits all aspects of the various emphases found in each of the three precise predictions. Matthew’s stress upon the actual, physical presence of the Son of Man is clearly met in the transfiguration because Jesus was personally and visibly present.... Mark’s emphasis upon a display of the kingdom with “power” was certainly fulfilled by the transfiguration. No one could doubt that the transfiguration certainly fit the definition of a “power encounter” for the disciples. That Jesus appears dressed in the Shekinah glory of God upon the Mount (Mark 9:3) is further evidence to the disciples that He was God and acted with His power. Luke’s simple statement about some who will “see the kingdom of God” is vindicated also by his account (9:28–36). Twice Luke records our Lord describing the transfiguration with the term “glory” (9:31–32).<sup>10</sup>

Matthew 16:27–28 does not teach that Christ established a spiritual form of the kingdom in His first-century ministry. Jesus was only saying that a glimpse of the kingdom would be manifested in a few days. This glimpse of the kingdom took place on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1–13).

### **Forfeiting the Kingdom**

Matthew 21:43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

People disagree about who loses the kingdom and who will receive it. Advocates of “kingdom now” theology claim that Israel has forfeited the kingdom permanently and the church has received it instead. However, this idea, known as replacement theology, is not what this passage teaches. There are two main reasons for this.

First, those who believe in replacement theology are wrong to say that the kingdom was taken from all of Israel. The context shows that Christ was only talking to Israel in the first century. Matthew 21:45 says, “Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.” This group of unbelieving Israel and their religious leaders in the first century is the only group that lost the kingdom, not all of Israel at all times and in all places.

Second, those who believe in replacement theology are wrong to say that the church is the nation that receives the kingdom. The church is not a nation. In Romans 10:19, Paul writes, “But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: ‘I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.’” Here, Paul explains how God’s blessing on the church now is making unbelieving Israel jealous. In this description Paul calls the church

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<sup>9</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 336.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” in *The End Times Controversy: The Second Coming under Attack*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 88.

a non-nation. The noun “nation” (*ethnos*) is used twice here to show that the church does not have a national status. The church is made up of believers in Jesus Christ from all nations (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14–15; Col. 3:11; Rev. 5:9). Some people use 1 Peter 2:9 to say that the church is a nation. But this argument is wrong because it assumes that 1 Peter was written to all the church instead of just to the believing Jews who were scattered.

It is better to think that the nation in Matthew 21:43 is a future generation of believing Jews. This view fits well with the rest of Matthew’s Gospel, which talks about a physical and spiritual future restoration of national Israel (Mt. 23:38–39; 24:31; 25:31). Also, the word nation (*ethnos*) that is translated “people” or “nation” in Matthew 21:43 is used of national Israel in other places in Scripture, such as in John 11:51 and Acts 24:17.

So, Matthew 21:43 does not teach that Israel as a whole has lost the kingdom and the church received it in a spiritual way. Rather, it teaches that the kingdom was taken from Israel in the first century and will be given to a future believing national Israel in the coming millennial kingdom.

### **My Kingdom Is Not of This World**

John 18:36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

“Kingdom now” theologians use this verse to teach that Christ’s kingdom is entirely spiritual rather than physical. However, in this verse Jesus did not deny that a future kingdom would someday be established on earth.

Christ said this very late in His ministry. By then, the kingdom that He had offered to Israel in the first century (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:5–7) had been turned down (Mt. 12:24) and taken away (Mt. 21:43). So, in John 18:36, Christ was simply telling Pilate that God’s kingdom was not a danger to the Roman Empire at that time. Thomas Constable explains what Christ meant:

Jesus was not denying that His kingdom was an earthly kingdom. He was not saying it was only the spiritual rule of God over the hearts of His people. He was not saying that His kingdom had nothing to do with this world, either. This should be clear from Jesus’ other references to His kingdom as being an earthly kingdom. His point was that He and His kingdom were not a present threat to Rome (cf. 18:10–11). It was non-threatening because God had postponed the messianic kingdom—due to Israel’s unbelief—though Jesus did not explain this to Pilate.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus said, “but *now* My kingdom is not from here (NKJV; italics added).” In other words, Jesus was saying, “My kingdom is not *now* established.” Christ was not denying the kingdom’s ultimate future establishment on earth. Rather, He was only denying its immediate existence. E. R. Craven explains the significance of the adverb “now”:

In this utterance, it is contended that our Lord intended to declare to Pilate that the kingdom He came to establish was not after the manner of the kingdoms of this world, i.e., not external, political. It is admitted that the utterance considered in itself will bear this interpretation; but it will also bear one consistent with the theory herein advocated,

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on John,” 294, accessed February 5, 2014, <http://www.soniclight.com>.

especially in view of the introduction of *nyn* in the last clause of the verse, which may be regarded as a particle of time—My kingdom is not now established.<sup>12</sup>

Instead of saying that it would never be on earth in the future, Christ was simply saying where His kingdom came from. Christ explained “My kingdom is not *of* this world (*italics added*).” The word translated “of” is the Greek preposition *ek*. Alva McClain explains the significance: “The preposition is *ek*, indicating source or originating cause. His kingdom does not originate in the present cosmos or world system.”<sup>13</sup>

Since the origin of the kingdom is heaven, Scripture refers to it as “the kingdom of heaven (see Mt. 3:1–2; 4:17; 10:5–7).” It will also be inaugurated by the “God of heaven.” Daniel connects this “God of heaven” with His coming kingdom:

“And in the days of these kings *the God of heaven* will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever (Dan. 2:44; *italics added*).”

In John 18:36, Christ does not teach that His kingdom is only spiritual. He simply says that the kingdom that will come to the earth one day comes from heaven. Christ said this after the offer of the kingdom had been rescinded. As such, this verse only speaks about the kingdom’s source. Therefore, we conclude that John 18:36 cannot be used to support “kingdom now” theology.

### **All Authority Has Been Given to Me**

Matthew 28:18–20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Some use this text to teach that the Davidic Kingdom is a present reality. Progressive Dispensationalists claim that the Davidic Kingdom is present in spiritual form as Jesus now reigns from David’s Throne from heaven over the church. Although they hold to a future (“not yet”) earthly reign of Christ, they also contend that the Davidic Kingdom is “already” here in spiritual form. Progressive Dispensationalists point to Jesus’ words, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” to justify their claim.

However, there are a number of reasons that this text cannot be used to support the concept of a spiritual form of the Davidic Kingdom here and now.

It should be noted that the word “kingdom” (*basileia*) is not used in this text. The word for kingdom is used many times in the Gospels to talk about the nearness of the kingdom or when it will be established (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 24:14; 25:34; 26:29; Lk. 10:9). Therefore, we might expect that the word “kingdom” would be used in the immediate context of this verse had Christ wanted to clearly state that the Davidic Kingdom was now a present reality.

There is little or no similarity between the present age and the future Davidic Kingdom. The future Davidic Kingdom will be a time when Christ will reign with perfect justice and a rod of iron (Rev. 12:5). In that day, any rebellion will be immediately punished (Zech. 14:16–18; Rev.

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<sup>12</sup> Craven, “*Excursus*,” 100.

<sup>13</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 381.



20:7–9). On the other hand, what is expected for the present Church Age is a growing departure from the truth. Second Timothy 3:1 warns, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.” Second Timothy 3:13 says, “But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Thus, Paul in his last letter foresees an increasing apostasy throughout the Church Age. The present realities we see today do not match what David was promised about the Messiah ruling with a rod of iron and perfect justice (Ps. 2:9). Paul’s prediction of Church Age apostasy is diametrically opposite to “kingdom now” theology. The only way an “already / not yet” view of the kingdom can be supported is to ignore what the New Testament predicts about the church’s apostasy.

The prophets in the Old Testament presented the kingdom as having a physical, earthly aspect involving national Israel. Such a sudden shift from seeing the kingdom as having this physical aspect to only a spiritual aspect of Jesus reigning in the church is inconsistent. If the prophecies of Jesus’ First Coming were fulfilled literally, then why should we expect the prophecies about his Second Coming be fulfilled in a non-literal manner?

The fact that Jesus was given all authority just before He ascended to heaven does not mean that He is exercising this authority as a king today. Jesus as the promised Messiah has 3 offices: prophet<sup>14</sup>, priest<sup>15</sup>, and king<sup>16</sup>. During His time on earth, Jesus served as the predicted prophet of the Old Testament. Currently, He is serving as our great High Priest in heaven after the order of Melchizedek making intercession for us. During the Millennial kingdom, He will function on earth as the King reigning from the throne of David in Jerusalem. There is a difference between having authority (Mt. 28:18) and using authority. While having authority, He does not use that authority to its full extent. He instead stays faithfully at the Father’s right hand and waits for His Father to decide when He will rule over the earth from Jerusalem. Christ is using limited authority, not in His Davidic rule but rather in empowering the church to fulfill the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18 is linked to verses 19–20 which say, “Go therefore (*oun*) and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The word “therefore” (*oun*) in verse 19 connects back to verse 18.

Although Christ was granted all authority following His resurrection, He only uses that authority today in a limited sense. He did not establish His kingdom in spiritual form but rather He enables His church to carry out the Great Commission.

This passage about the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18–20) should not be confused with the Davidic rule and future kingdom. The millennial rule of Christ over His kingdom will happen from the land of Israel in the city of Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2–3; Zech. 14:16–18). In contrast, the disciples were told to spread the gospel to all nations of the world. The Great Commission cannot be used to justify an “already / not yet” form of the Davidic Kingdom.

#### *PASSAGES IN ACTS*

“Kingdom now” theologians rely upon the handful of references to the “kingdom” scattered

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<sup>14</sup> Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22-23; Lk. 13:33; Mt. 13:57

<sup>15</sup> 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 6:20; 9:11; 24-26; 10:12

<sup>16</sup> Mt. 2:2; 21:5; 27:11

throughout Acts, which indicate that the apostles “preached the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

### **Was Pentecost the Fulfilling of Joel’s Prophecy? (Acts 2:14–16)**

Acts 2:14–16 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel...”

In Acts 2, Peter was not claiming a fulfillment or even a partial fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. He was only comparing what had happened at Pentecost with what would take place in the future as Joel predicted about the end times.

Dr. Ryrie explains Peter’s quote of Joel’s prophecy:

Peter was not saying that the prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost or even that it was partially fulfilled; knowing from Joel what the Spirit could do, he was simply reminding the Jews that they should have recognized what they were then seeing as a work of the Spirit also.<sup>17</sup>

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum contrasts the events of Acts 2 with Joel’s prophecy:

Virtually nothing that happened in Acts 2 is predicted in Joel 2. What actually did happen in Acts two (the speaking in tongues) was not mentioned by Joel. What Joel did mention (dreams, visions, the sun darkened, the moon turned into blood) did not happen in Acts two. Joel was speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the whole of the nation of Israel in the last days, while Acts two speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Twelve Apostles or, at most, on the 120 in the Upper Room. This is a far cry from Joel’s *all flesh*. However, there was one point of similarity, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, resulting in unusual manifestations. Acts two does not change or reinterpret Joel two, nor does it deny that Joel two will have a literal fulfillment when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the whole nation of Israel. It is simply applying it to a New Testament event because of one point of similarity.<sup>18</sup>

In verse 16, Peter said, “this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel (NKJV).” In New Testament Greek, the phrase *τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ* (*touto estin to*) literally means “this is the thing.” The KJV renders the phrase as “this is that which.” Peter used this phrase as a tool of comparison showing how the events of Pentecost were similar to what Joel had foretold about the last days and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Thomas Ice explains:

The “this is that” to which Peter refers in Acts 2 from Joel 2 is the point of similarity that the Holy Spirit was producing both results. The manifestations on the Day of Pentecost were not produced by wine but by God’s Spirit. Further, there was no spiritual fulfillment of the darkening of the sun, moon and stars on Pentecost, nor does this provide a precedent for the allegorical interpretation of Old Testament prophecy in the New Testament. Joel 2 will be

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<sup>17</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Acts of the Apostles, Everyman’s Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1961), 20–21.

<sup>18</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, pp. 844–45.

fulfilled in the future, just before the second coming of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

How a person views the church will affect how they understand this passage. If the church is viewed as the first stage of the messianic kingdom, as progressive dispensationalists do, then Acts 2 might be seen as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days. On the other hand, if the church is viewed as distinct from the messianic kingdom, then Acts 2 would be less likely to be seen as a fulfillment or even a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

Progressive Dispensationalists use Acts 2 to support the "already / not yet" view of the Kingdom. They argue that Peter applies the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 to the events of Pentecost. However, there are several problems with this view.

Peter does not apply Joel's prophecy to the church, but rather he applies it to Israel. He addresses his audience as "men of Judea" and "all you who dwell in Jerusalem" (Acts 2:14), and he quotes from Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 to prove that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel (Acts 2:25-36). He also calls his listeners to repent and be baptized "for the forgiveness of your sins" and "for the promise is for you and for your children..." (Acts 2:38-39). These expressions are related to Israel's covenant promises, not to the church's spiritual blessings.

Also, Peter does not reinterpret Joel's prophecy in a spiritual or symbolic way, but he takes it literally. He does not allegorize or spiritualize the signs in heaven and on earth, such as blood, fire, smoke, sun, moon, and stars (Joel 2:30-31; Acts 2:19-20). He also does not deny or ignore the future aspect of Joel's prophecy, which includes the day of the Lord, the judgment of the nations, and the salvation of Israel (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:20-21).

Acts 2 cannot reasonably be used to argue for either "kingdom now" or an "already / not yet" spiritual form of the kingdom existing today.

### **How The Proclamation of the Kingdom Was Used in Acts (Acts 1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31)**

"Kingdom now" theologians use several references to the "kingdom" in Acts to justify their position. The Greek term *basileia* ("kingdom") appears in the phrase "kingdom of God" eight times in Acts (1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

Alva McClain comments on the usage of *basileia* in Acts:

In the Book of Acts this "kingdom of God" appears as something future, the term being used, as James Orr has observed, "in an almost exclusively eschatological sense." The Old Testament prophecies of the Messianic Kingdom, occasionally quoted by the apostles (cf. Acts 2:25-36; 3:22-36; 13:22-39) are used to show the regal rights of Jesus the Messiah. But nowhere do they ever assert that the Kingdom has been established. In passages about which there can be no dispute, this is a matter which belongs to the future when the King returns from heaven (cf. 1:6-11; 3:19-21; 15:13-16). The passage in 14:22, "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God," is sometimes used to prove a present Messianic Kingdom established on earth in the church. But such a use would prove too much.... But in the Old Testament prophetic picture of the coming

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<sup>19</sup> Ice, Thomas. Peter's Quotation of Joel in Acts 2. Last accessed: 10/1/2023.  
[https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1086&context=pretrib\\_arch](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1086&context=pretrib_arch)

Messianic Kingdom, as every intelligent Jew understood, a period of terrible tribulation always precedes its establishment on earth.... Therefore the passage in 14:22 is in complete harmony with the historical situation and the progress of revelation.... The argument advanced by some, that since the apostles throughout the Acts period preached “the things concerning the kingdom of God” (19:8), therefore the Kingdom must have already been established, is not very good logic. Most of us preach and teach many things in the Christian faith which are not yet realized in experience. No sensible person would argue that because the apostles continually preached the resurrection of the dead, therefore, it must have already taken place.<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Andy Woods makes an interesting comparison between Luke and Acts regarding how often the word kingdom is used:

It is also worth noting how few references there are to the word “kingdom” in Acts in comparison to Luke’s prequel to Acts (Lk. 1:1–4; Acts 1:1), known as the Gospel of Luke. Despite the fact that “kingdom” is only found eight times in Acts, it is used forty-five times in Luke. Why the difference? ... the Gospels record the offer of the kingdom to national Israel (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:5–7; Lk. 10:1, 9). Thus, in the Gospels the kingdom is portrayed as being in a state of imminency or immediate expectancy. However, the Gospels also record Israel’s rejection of their king (John 19:15), thereby leading to the kingdom’s postponement. Thus, by the time the events recorded in the Book of Acts transpire, the kingdom is already in a state of abeyance or postponement. Consequently, it is referred to as the ultimate yet distant hope of the Church-Age believer. Only such a reading could explain the voluminous use of the term in Luke’s Gospel compared to its scant use in Acts.<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Toussaint adds:

The fact that Luke uses kingdom only eight times in Acts after such heavy usage in his gospel implies that the kingdom had not begun but was in fact, postponed.<sup>22</sup>

The eight references in Acts to the “kingdom” cannot legitimately be used to justify “kingdom now” theology.

### *PASSAGES IN PAUL’S LETTERS*

#### **The Kingdom Is Not Eating and Drinking (Rom. 14:17)**

Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Some “kingdom now” proponents cite this verse to emphasize the current and spiritual nature of the kingdom. They argue against the expectation of a future, physical kingdom with activities like eating and drinking, asserting that the kingdom is purely spiritual and already in existence.

Nevertheless, when we examine Romans 14:17 closely, it becomes evident that it does not deny the concept of an earthly kingdom. Paul simply reminds believers not to place undue focus on

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<sup>20</sup> McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*. p. 424–26.

<sup>21</sup> Woods. *The Coming Kingdom*.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, “Israel and the Church of a Traditional Dispensationalist,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 242.

the physical aspects of the kingdom while neglecting its spiritual dimensions. This principle of emphasizing rather than excluding is a common thread woven throughout Scripture. An example of this principle can be found in the realm of material wealth. Rather than focusing on material wealth, the Bible encourages believers to prioritize their spiritual values. For example, 1 Peter 3:3–4 does not teach the complete avoidance of adornments. Rather, it underscores the importance of emphasizing inner beauty over outward appearances (1 Peter 3:6; Prov. 31:30).

### **Kingdom Power (1 Cor. 4:20)**

1 Corinthians 4:20: For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

Some “kingdom now” advocates point to the verb “is” in this verse to support their view. Dr. Toussaint refutes that argument, “There is no verb in the Greek text, so it must be supplied. That Paul is anticipating the future is seen in verse five and eight of the same chapter.”<sup>23</sup>

The context of verse 20, Paul argues for a futuristic understanding of the word “kingdom.” Earlier in the same chapter Paul wrote, “judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God (v. 5).” A few verses later Paul sarcastically said, “You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you (v. 8)!” Alva McClain commented, “To interpret 1 Corinthians 4:20 as a present kingdom of the saints would make Paul contradict what he had already written in verses five and eight.”<sup>24</sup>

### **He Must Reign Until... (1 Cor. 15:23–28)**

1 Corinthians 15:23–28 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says, “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

In this passage, Paul outlines three stages of resurrection: Christ’s resurrection (the first fruits), the resurrection of those who belong to Christ at His return, and finally, the end. The “end” is when Christ delivers up the kingdom to God the Father, having abolished all rule, authority, and power. This period is described as a reign during which all enemies are subjected to Him, with death being the last enemy to be subjugated.

Progressive Dispensationalists use this text to argue that Christ’s reign may have begun at His First Coming. Some suggest that this reign could extend back to the first stage of resurrection (Christ’s resurrection). They attempt to use both Psalm 8 and Psalm 110 claiming a partial, spiritual fulfillment today. This is known as complementary hermeneutics which is a defective method of Bible interpretation.<sup>25</sup> These Psalms speak of Christ’s direct and physical rule on earth. They do not portray a spiritual rule of Christ from heaven. Psalm 8 expands upon Genesis 1:26–28, stating that man was created to rule successfully over the earth. The last Adam (Jesus)

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<sup>23</sup> Toussaint, “Israel and the Church of a Traditional Dispensationalist,” 246.

<sup>24</sup> McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 435.

<sup>25</sup> See our paper on Progressive Dispensationalism.

must succeed in the realm where the first Adam failed — on earth. A spiritual reign from heaven does not fulfill God’s kingdom program as outlined in Genesis 1:26–28 and Psalm 8.

In contrast to the view held by Progressive Dispensationalism and proponents of “kingdom now” theology, it is evident that 1 Corinthians 15:23–28 does not align with their position. In fact, Psalms 8 and 110, as well as the broader context of 1 Corinthians depict the kingdom as a future event yet to be realized.

### **Transferred into the Kingdom of His Son (Col. 1:13)**

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

According to “kingdom now” theologians, this verse teaches that when someone becomes a believer, they are transferred from Satan’s kingdom or dominion into the present, spiritual form of the Messianic kingdom. However, Jesus is never referred to as the king of the church. Rather He is the bridegroom, and we are His bride.

This verse could be understood as dealing with positional truth. It could relate to our positional standing as opposed to our actual state. This heavenly position represents the legal standing of the believer. Yet believers are not actually in heaven now. While it is true that believers have been legally delivered from Satan’s dominion (1 John 5:18), this liberation is not always apparent in their day-to-day experiences. In reality, believers often find themselves in spiritual battles against the authority of Satan, as emphasized in Ephesians 6:12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” This “standing versus state” concept makes sense given the parallels between the Books of Colossians and Ephesians. If we apply the concept of “standing versus state” found in Ephesians, which pertains to the believer’s heavenly position (Eph. 2:6), it is reasonable to extend this understanding to Colossians regarding the believer’s position in the kingdom (Col. 1:13). Consequently, the essence of Colossians 1:13 primarily conveys that believers are citizens of the future earthly kingdom rather than participants in a present spiritual Davidic kingdom, as some might suggest.

Another possible interpretation to consider is that Colossians 1:13 might be referring to the universal kingdom rather than the Davidic kingdom.<sup>26</sup> The kingdom that Paul refers to in this verse stands in contrast with Satan’s kingdom of darkness. Since Satan’s dominion, to some extent, extends universally in the present (1 John 5:19), it follows that the kingdom of Christ, contrasted with Satan’s, may also carry a universal connotation.

### **Fellow Workers for the Kingdom of God (Col. 4:11)**

Colossians 4:11 These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God...

Advocates of “kingdom now” theology reason that if Paul refers to his co-laborers as fellow workers for the kingdom of God, then they must have been all working together to establish God’s kingdom upon the earth at that time.

However, there is no indication in this verse to identify the time period of this kingdom. Many passages in Paul’s writings place the kingdom exclusively in the future (1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:24,

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<sup>26</sup> See *The Coming Millennial Kingdom—Part 1* to understand the differences between the universal kingdom and the theocratic kingdom.

50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18). Therefore, it is only reasonable to understand the “kingdom” here to be in harmony with the rest of Paul’s references to the kingdom.

Alva McClain explains, “... the passage may be read in harmony with the idea of a future Kingdom, toward which as a glorious goal all the labors of the Church are directed.”<sup>27</sup>

G. N. H. Peters similarly observes, “There is only one kingdom.... and believers become ‘heirs’ of it.... The apostles represent themselves and co-laborers as working for it still future, Col. 4:11; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 12:28, etc.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Walk Worthy of the Kingdom (1 Thes. 2:12)**

1 Thessalonians 2:12: That you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Some “kingdom now” teachers understand this verse as an invitation for believers to actively participate in establishing God’s kingdom on earth in the present time.

But notice that this text couples the word “kingdom” with “glory.” Since believers on earth are not yet in glory, it would be reasonable to conclude that this is a concept of a forthcoming “kingdom.” Thus, the kingdom spoken of here is future and not present. Nevertheless, the future should affect the present. Believers should live for the glory of God in view of the coming kingdom.

### **King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:15)**

1 Timothy 6:15 He who is ... the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Some argue that Jesus must presently govern a spiritual form of the Davidic Kingdom because He is addressed as “the King of kings and Lord of lords”. However, it is crucial to distinguish between bearing a title and actively performing the duties associated with that title. A historical parallel can be drawn from David’s life. He was anointed as king (1 Sam. 13) long before he began his actual reign (2 Sam. 2; 5). David’s ascent to the throne occurred only after Saul’s demise and subsequent removal from power. Hence, being referred to as king differed significantly from functioning as a king.

Likewise, regardless of Christ’s designation as king, He has not started His rule in that role. This becomes evident when examining various New Testament passages indicating that Satan, while ultimately defeated, currently maintains a temporary position as the god of this world (Luke 4:5–8; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19, etc.). The present era cannot be synonymous with the Davidic kingdom, as during that future age, all of Christ’s adversaries will be subjected to His authority (Ps. 2:8–9; 110:1). Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews states, “But now we do not see all things subjected to him” (Heb. 2:8).

When examining the context of 1 Timothy 6:15, it becomes apparent that the time when Jesus will reign as “the King of kings and Lord of lords” is in the future. Verse 15 also alludes to “the proper time,” which is explicitly defined in the preceding verse as “the appearing of our Lord

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<sup>27</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 435.

<sup>28</sup> George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (New York: 1884; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952), 1:600.

Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14). This phrase unmistakably points to the Second Coming. In light of these considerations, it is reasonable to conclude that at the future Second Coming, Christ will fulfill His already designated role as the “King of kings.”

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. -Rev. 19:11-16

And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be “The LORD is one,” And His name one. ... And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. -Zech. 14:9, 16

#### *PASSAGES IN THE GENERAL LETTERS AND REVELATION*

#### **Since We Are Receiving a Kingdom (Heb. 12:28)**

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom...

Some “kingdom now” promoters say that the phrase “we are receiving a kingdom” proves the existence of a present, spiritual form of the kingdom. However, it seems better to interpret this reference on the basis of the “standing versus state” concept that has been discussed previously. Although believers are currently heirs of God’s coming kingdom regarding their standing, the kingdom is not yet an actual reality upon the earth. Hebrews 12:28 is simply teaching that believers are citizens of the future earthly kingdom rather than residents of a kingdom that exists today in a spiritual form.

Alva McClain explains:

It is not unusual for Scripture, on behalf of believers, to assert ownership regarding certain blessings even before they are possessed in Christian experience. Compare 1 Corinthians 3:21–22 where “all things” are said to belong to the believer, yet among these things are some that are yet “to come.” The ownership is legally certain, though the experience of possession may be future.<sup>29</sup>

#### **A Kingdom of Priests (1 Peter 2:9)**

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...

At Mt. Sinai, God told Moses to tell the people, “You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6).”

Some proponents of “kingdom now” theology claim that since the Old Testament referred to national Israel as a kingdom of priests, these same references can be directly applied to the New

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<sup>29</sup> McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 436.



Testament church. According to this perspective, if the church is recognized as a kingdom of priests, it implies that, much like Old Testament Israel, the church currently embodies a tangible representation of God's kingdom on earth.

However, it is more probable that Peter was simply proposing that the church shares certain similarities with God's kingdom program for Israel in the Old Testament. In other words, just as Israel acted as God's ambassador to the nations and was called to a life of holiness, the church's mission and pursuit of personal holiness can be seen as being similar. It is a logical fallacy to assume that similarity is the same as equality.

It is quite possible that 1 Peter 2:9 may not even be addressed to the church as a whole but rather only to the more limited audience of the believing Jewish remnant within the church. This interpretation is supported by the following evidence:

1. The absence of a reference to the church in 1 Peter 1:1, which is a common formula used by Paul when addressing a church-wide audience.
2. The use of the term "diaspora" in 1 Peter 1:1, which typically refers to Jews dispersed among Gentiles.
3. The use of terms like "aliens" or "sojourners" and "pilgrims" in the letter, which are typically used to describe Jews in the Diaspora.
4. The distinction between Peter's audience and their Gentile neighbors in 2:12 and 4:3.
5. The concepts in 1 Peter 2:9, which are singular and thus could not describe the diverse church but could describe the Jewish race.
6. The passage notes that while Peter did minister to Gentiles (Acts 10:34–38; Gal. 2:12), his primary ministry was to the Jews (Gal. 2:7–8). Therefore, it's logical to assume that his letter was addressed to a Jewish audience.

If this understanding of the original audience is correct, then it puts Peter's intentions in a whole new light. It could be concluded that Peter's primary purpose in referencing Exodus 19:5–6 was to illustrate that even though national Israel failed to embrace its calling as outlined in Exodus, the believing Jewish remnant within the church had not failed in like manner. In other words, in using this citation Peter was not suggesting that the church, as a whole, now stands as the earthly representation of God's kingdom.

### **A Kingdom of Priests (Rev. 1:6)**

Revelation 1:6 [He] has made us kings and priests...

"Kingdom now" theologians frequently employ this passage to support their viewpoint. Their argument suggests that if we are designated as a kingdom of priests, it implies that we are currently dwelling within a spiritual manifestation of the kingdom. However, John provides additional insights in Revelation 5:10 that shed light on the matter. In this verse, John writes, "And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

Revelation 5:10 offers a clarification regarding when and where the church will exercise its authority as a kingdom of priests. This time of exercising authority is clearly in the future, as indicated by the use of the future tense verb "shall reign." Clearly, this reign is not a present reality but an event that lies ahead. Additionally, the concluding clause in Revelation 5:10

underscores that this reign will occur in the future upon the earth.

By comparing Revelation 1:6 and 5:10, we arrive at a comprehensive understanding. While believers are presently acknowledged as a kingdom of priests, their actual exercise of this role, in the capacity of reigning, awaits the establishment of the future Messianic kingdom on earth. This harmonizes with the biblical narrative, pointing towards a time when believers will fulfill their priestly and kingly roles in a future earthly reign.

### **Companion in the Kingdom (Rev. 1:9)**

Revelation 1:9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the ... kingdom...

“Kingdom now” theologians reason that since John describes himself to his readers as a companion in the kingdom, then the kingdom must be a present spiritual reality.

However, other sections of Revelation describe the kingdom as both future and earthly (Rev. 5:10; 11:15; 20:1–10). Thus, Revelation 1:9 is speaking of the future millennial reign of Christ. In fact, most commentators understand the word kingdom (*basileia*) in Revelation 1:9 as referring to the future Millennial kingdom.

Robert Thomas wrote, “Little difference of opinion exists over the meaning of *basileia* in 1:9. It is the millennial kingdom described more fully in Revelation 20.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Jesus Has the Key of David (Rev. 3:7)**

Revelation 3:7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, “These things says He who ... has the key of David...”

Some theologians use this verse to argue that Christ is now reigning over a present, spiritual form of the Davidic kingdom. According to one Progressive Dispensationalist, “The rule is extended from the Father to the disciple through the Son, the one who in Revelation 3:7 says he has ‘the key of David.’ ... Here Jesus refers to himself as ‘the one who has the key of David,’ a phrase that contains a present participle... ‘the one who has.’ This is currently held Davidic authority.”<sup>31</sup> However, this argument does not justify the claim that the Davidic Kingdom is currently in existence.

The concept of having “keys” doesn’t necessarily imply the present existence of the Davidic Kingdom. Peter received “keys” but didn’t instantly enter heaven. Citizenship in heaven and the future kingdom is distinct from physically entering those realms. When Jesus mentioned the necessity of the spiritual birth for entry into the kingdom in John 3, he wasn’t discussing how the kingdom would be established on Earth. Instead, he focused on the prerequisite for entry when it will finally be established. Similarly, in Revelation 3:7, Jesus granting authority for entry into the kingdom doesn’t indicate its present existence. It signifies the authority to bring people to faith. Converts, upon believing in Christ, gain citizenship in heaven and the future kingdom, but physically entering these realms awaits the future. Revelation 3:12 emphasizes this future orientation, as it speaks of being permanent pillars in God’s temple and having the name of the New Jerusalem written on them, which doesn’t imply immediate presence in these places. The overall emphasis is on the future, including the warning about potential loss of rewards at the

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas, *Revelation* 1–7, 275.

<sup>31</sup> Darrell Bock, “The Reign of the Lord Christ,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 64.

future judgment seat of Christ (Rev. 3:11).

The reign of Christ in the Davidic kingdom will be evident since His enemies will become His footstool (Ps. 110:1–2, 5–6). The glorious reign of Christ could not possibly fit the situation in which Christ addresses the Philadelphia Church. Their enemies were still active and persecuting them. These enemies had not yet been subdued. Because the conquest of these foes is yet to come, this text cannot be describing the Davidic reign of Christ.

### **CONCLUSION**

There are numerous prophetic passages in God’s Word about a future earthly kingdom with Messiah reigning over the whole world. When interpreting these passages using a consistent literal, historical grammatical method of interpretation, this view of a future kingdom on earth is unquestionable.

Admittedly, there are a few passages in God’s Word regarding the kingdom that are not as clear as others. The fact is that the majority of Scripture passages dealing with the kingdom clearly depict a future reign of Christ on earth. A fundamental principle of Bible interpretation is that the clear always interprets the unclear. This axiom should be followed when considering unclear passages in the Word of God regarding the kingdom.

As we look at the conditions on earth today, it is painfully obvious that we are not now living in the glorious kingdom promised by the Old Testament prophets. Likewise, we are not living in an “already / not yet” spiritual form of the kingdom.

We look forward to that day when Messiah will take His rightful place on the throne of David in Jerusalem. Until that time, we live as ambassadors of the kingdom in this world who are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

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