

SPIRITUALIZING THE KINGDOM

The Scriptures, properly understood, show that the Messianic Kingdom is consistently shown to be a FUTURE reality. There is a lot of errant “***kingdom now***” teaching, but in reality, the kingdom is a future reality.

Keep this straight. Israel consistently means Israel; the Church means the Church; and the kingdom means the kingdom. When we don't keep these distinct, a lot of confusion and error are the result.

After the fall of the Jewish nation in AD 70, the Gentiles quickly began to see themselves now as the recipients of God's favor and that God was done with the Jews (cf. Rom. 11:18, 25).

The early Church held a premillennial return of Christ and that He would come again to literally reign on the earth. However, Origen (185-254 AD) began to “***spiritualize***” the idea of the kingdom and understood it to be realized in the present Church Age (cf. *Ryrie, Basic Theology*, p. 448).

But, it was Augustine (354-430 AD) who systematized an allegorical approach to understanding the kingdom. So, Origen laid the foundation and Augustine systematized a “***spiritual view***” of the kingdom.

Augustine in his famous book “***The City of God***” put forth the idea that the Church was the kingdom of God on earth. When Constantine gave Christianity favored status in the Roman Empire, it gave impetus to the idea that the Church is now the kingdom on earth and that God is now building His kingdom through the Church.

This view that the Church is the kingdom became the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. The key Reformers, Calvin and Luther, broke with Roman Catholicism in areas of soteriology (salvation), but they did not essentially break with Roman Catholicism in the area of eschatology (future things).

So, Augustine's rejection of a literal, coming earthly kingdom of the Messiah has influenced the Church (in the broadest definition of the word) for about 1,600 years. Even to this day, the effects of an allegorical/spiritualized approach to prophecy and the kingdom (versus a literal approach) is still felt.

As a result, there are all kinds of errors regarding kingdom teaching. Examples include the idea that the kingdom is already spiritually present and that the Church is now building the kingdom in the hearts of God's

people. But this is not the kingdom, as God has always “ruled” in the hearts of His people in all dispensations (cf. Heb. 11). Others teach what is called “**dominion theology**”; with the idea that the Church’s mission is to “Christianize” society and government, and thus “bring in the kingdom”.

Others promote the idea that the kingdom is already here, but at the same time, not yet. Because of errant kingdom teaching, there is often an unbalanced or incorrect emphasis on a social gospel and social justice which is heavy on a social emphasis but tends to be weak on heralding the actual gospel of Christ.

Dispensationalists (of which I am one) teach a clear distinction between Israel and the Church. We believe in a literal, coming Messianic Kingdom which is yet future, in which Israel will be restored and prominent. However, some criticize dispensationalism because they say it has only come to be a recognized “systematic theology” in modern times since the 1800’s. They often overlook two things. Number one, the early Church fathers prior to Origen overwhelmingly held to a coming, literal Messianic Kingdom. Secondly, they overlook the nuance of Daniel 12.

Daniel 12:9–10 (NKJV)

9 And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for **the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.**

10 Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the **wise shall understand.**

Daniel is clear that at the time of the end, a heightened level of understanding regarding prophetic truth concerning Israel will come to the fore. I acknowledge that primarily in view are the Jews in the context of the Last Days Tribulation Period, as the surrounding context would argue.

Still, the general point is that the end times will be a time of deeper understanding in regard to prophetic truth. Daniel 12:4 says to seal the book “**until the time of the end**”.

We are told this will be a time when “**many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.**” The description is one of intense activity in pouring over the prophetic Scriptures and thereby gaining deeper insight into prophetic truth.

Therefore, it should not surprise us that the closer we get to the end, the more deeply the prophetic Scriptures will be understood by those who study the Bible intensely and take it for what it plainly teaches.

If people are to understand the future consummation of the kingdom, they must first understand “kingdom truth” in biblical history. If they are to properly understand the kingdom about which Jesus taught, then they must first consider what the Old Testament prophets taught. And if one is to properly understand the Book of Revelation, one must first begin with a proper understanding of the Book of Daniel.

It is generally agreed that if the Scriptures are taken in their normal/literal sense, they foretell of a literal restoration of Israel in the Last Days, a literal coming of Christ, and a literal setting up of His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years, which will then merge into the eternal state. In this coming, literal kingdom, the Jews will have the prominent position (cf. Deut. 28:13; Zech. 8:23), with Jerusalem serving as the worship center and capital of the great King/Priest (cf. Zech. 6:12-13; chp. 14), Who will rule over all the world.

God’s choice of Israel is the means and not the ends. From the beginning, God has intended that Israel be a channel of blessing to the whole world, as seen in Genesis 12:3. It has well been said that ***“Israel’s role is to bring blessings to the nations, not to make everybody Israel.”***

As Paul said of Israel in Rom. 11:15, ***“For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”***

If the setting aside of the Jews resulted in many Gentiles being saved, then their restoration, which will be a resurrection-like event, will result in even greater blessing for the entire world (cf. 8:21, 11:12, Ezek. 37:11-14).

The kingdom prophesied in the OT is the same kingdom presented and offered in the gospels. It is this same kingdom that is then developed in the gospels and the New Testament. All through history the people of God have been moving towards the kingdom which will be ruled over by the Messiah. This is the focal point toward which the whole of history is moving. Although Israel has temporarily been set aside, there will come a time when Israel will be restored and be the central nation in the kingdom. Presently Christ is preparing a bride for Himself (the Church) which will rule and reign with Him in His future kingdom reign on the earth. The BEST is yet to be! The Kingdom is coming!

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was a German who is considered by many to be the greatest composer of all time. He said, “The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.”

Bach reportedly would often sleep, taking extended naps. His children had a unique way of waking him up. They would go to the piano and begin playing one of his compositions. When they got to the last note they would NOT play it. It would invariably wake him up. Bach would get up from his sleep, go to the piano and play the final chord. He couldn't stand to leave it just hanging there UNFINISHED.

In the same way, God is composing a KINGDOM MASTERPIECE, and He will finish the KINGDOM composition that He is developing. The final note in God's triumphant song will be the KINGDOM CHORD!

And so we in effect pray, "Please play that chord; Your kingdom come."

"Even so, come Lord Jesus!" Maranatha!