

When did the Kingdom Come?

Everyone is agreed that the coming of the kingdom in fulness is at the return of the Lord Jesus at the end of the age. ‘... 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.’ (1 Cor 15:24). It is for this that we pray daily, ‘Thy kingdom come’. This is the consummation of the kingdom; the issuing in of the finale expression of the kingdom in perfection. This is when there is no other kingdom but God’s on the earth.

But when did the kingdom of God begin? There is confusion on this topic.

Introductory material

What is a kingdom? It is the rule and reign of a king over a people. It is more than control of a country; often a king will have more subjects than are present in his land, it is the rule over a people. Where is the prime example of God’s absolute rule over a person? It is in Christ. Only in Jesus do we see full obedience to the will of God; he is the only real expression of the kingdom as the rule of God in a man. So who are God’s people? They are those who are in Christ. By spiritual union with Christ they are seen by God as new creatures, and constitute his people. God’s reign is now in those who are in Christ, the elect, the church. The kingdom is not a material country, like Israel or the Vatican City, but converted people, ‘He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love’ (Col 1:13).

Thus the kingdom is a term for the elect, gathered today as the church, from the point of view of the rule of God’s will; ‘Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."'”¹ (Jn 3:3). From the viewpoint of God’s family, the elect are adopted sons; but from the consideration of God’s authoritative rule, the elect are the kingdom – those over whom God reigns. This rule is initiated and continued by God’s grace mediated by the Holy Spirit. God’s kingdom is gracious.

God has delegated his rule to his Son. Christ’s kingdom at this time is spiritual (Jn 18:36) since the rule is in the hearts of his people and over those heaven. Christ is Lord of all creation as creator and ordained King, but the earth is currently under the power of sin. Though it belongs to God it is dominated by human lawlessness and by Satan through directing man’s sin; thus the church/kingdom is at war with it (Matt 16:18; Rev 20:9). God is allowing this until the full number of elect is saved; then the world will be renewed and restored and heaven will be on Earth – the material and eternal kingdom of God. This what we pray for in the Lord’s Prayer – the consummation of the kingdom and the fulness of our salvation.

A technical matter

Dispensationalists make a distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven in order to further their doctrine of a dichotomy between the church and Israel. This is false.

We must emphasise that there is only one kingdom of God. The terms, ‘kingdom of heaven’ and ‘kingdom of God’ are synonymous; as proved by Matt 19:23-24 where Jesus uses both

¹ Thus any claim, of Jewish Root groups, that Israel or Jews constitute the kingdom of God, or the people of God, in the flesh is heretical because they are unregenerate.

terms interchangeably, and their use in Luke's parallel passages to those in Matthew (e.g. Matt 11:12-13 with Lk 16:16; Matt 10:7 with Lk 9:2; Matt 4:12,17 with Mk 1:14-15).

The key issue

The point of this paper is to show that there is a very real difference between the Christian experience in the OT and in the NT. The believers in the New Covenant have a very different experience of grace that those under the Old Covenant; this is because the kingdom was not in actual expression in the OT. God was still king, he is the creator and owns everything, but there was no expression of the kingdom in reality; it had not yet come. What existed were types of the kingdom, just as there were only types of the body of Christ and not the actual thing (in the Tabernacle and temple).

The close identification of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is a by-product of Covenant Theology. Reformed theologians have generally, since it was adopted by the Westminster Confession, taken the Covenant Theology view, which was developed by Dutch theologians in the 100 years after Calvin, after initial developments by Bullinger. The laudable objective was to stress the unity of the OT with the NT and show that there was no contradiction. Their goal was good but their technical developments were wrong.

The result of Covenant Theology is to blur the edges of the two covenants making them one. Thus it is often said that the New Covenant is but a change of administration of the Old Covenant and a development of the non-existent Covenant of Grace; itself a development of the equally non-existent Covenant of Redemption, which is itself the answer to a non-existent Covenant of Works. None of the latter three terms are Scriptural, while the Covenant of Works contains elements that are not only unbiblical but approach blasphemy. There was also a focus on Moses in Covenant Theology rather than a focus on Abraham; the difference is very important.² However, we cannot delve deeper into a discussion of this here.³

Thus Reformed theologians, by stressing that there was no real new development in the New Covenant (except more grace and more of the Spirit) have lost a great many truths that Christ considered important; not the least being the newness of the New Covenant and the baptism of the Spirit (not the Charismatic version).⁴

By considering that the experience of the OT believer was essentially the same of the NT believer we make many mistakes and cannot properly understand the kingdom.

This paper will explain some of the differences and show the privileges of being in the kingdom, something that OT saints longed to see.

² Covenant Theologians fail to understand that the Mosaic Covenant (Old Covenant) was temporary and only for Israel. Thus they bring Mosaic Law upon believers as a standard for their walk instead of demonstrating that Jesus, the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise, is the standard of righteous manhood. Mosaic Law magnifies sin to show the need for a deliverer from sin; the Abrahamic Covenant points to Christ and is the precursor of the Gospel and justification by faith.

³ For more information see my paper, *Error and its disciples*.

⁴ Charismatics claim that the baptism in the Spirit is a second blessing phenomenological experience based upon certain conditions (e.g. laying on of hands). This is totally unbiblical. 1 Cor 12:13 explains that the real baptism of the Spirit, promised by Jesus, was the action of the Spirit (upon Christ's command as crowned king) to change all the elect and make them spiritual people, and to them graft them into the body of Christ so that they are completely united in Christ and to each other. The sealing of the Spirit is the associated action of the Holy Spirit indwelling the elect so that God is present in the hearts of believers. Adoption (following justification) also makes the elect legal heirs with Christ as sons of God.

Why are NT saints greater than OT prophets?

For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. Lk 7:20

This means that there is a significant dichotomy between the expression of the Spirit in the OT and the NT. This is very important.

John was the greatest OT prophet because he was the one chosen to prepare the way for the Messiah. In a sense everything any prophet said was some sort of verbal preparation for the Messiah; but John's ministry was the one that actually made the way for the coming of Christ by drawing men to repentance and redirecting the nation to God's promises so that they were ready to receive Christ himself.

Now Jesus says that the least member of the kingdom of God is greater than John, who was the greatest prophet. This means that there is a sense in which every New Covenant saint is more gifted than Moses, David, Samuel, Isaiah and John the Baptist. In what way is this true?

It refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came upon men temporarily in the OT and occasionally filled a person for a short time, usually to do an important task. Thus Bezalel was filled with the Spirit in order to do the craftsmanship required for the building of the Tabernacle (Ex 31:1-5). The filling stopped when the work stopped. [Note that the first person filled with the Spirit was filled to be involved in building the type of the body.]

In the same manner Othniel, Caleb's younger brother, warred against Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, being given the ability of a general by the Spirit coming upon him (Jud 3:9-10). The same gifting was given to Gideon (Jud 6:34) and Jephthah (Jud 11:29). The most powerful 'coming upon' was in the case of Samson (Jud 14:6).

In all these cases the Spirit departed when the work was done. In the case of the Saul, the Spirit departed from him before the work was completed because he rebelled against God (1 Sam 16:14); David continued the wars of Israel.

In the OT, under the Old Covenant, no man had the Spirit permanently indwelling him. Jesus explained that this could not happen until he had ascended to God and had been crowned king over all authority as a man on the throne.

This He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Jn 7:39

It was only when the work of redemption was complete and Jesus had ascended and his coronation taken place that he could command the Spirit to be outpoured, baptising the whole body of Christ into Christ and into the Spirit. From that moment saints could be indwelled permanently.

By this indwelling, saints have God living in them, in their purified hearts, at all times. No OT saint ever had this; he could only prophesy as the Spirit came upon him (2 Chron 15:1, 20:14; Ezek 37:1). Saints can speak for God at all times as they walk consistently in the Spirit.

Thus OT prophets understood that a new covenant, a new experience of salvation, a new form of grace would follow the work of the Messiah.

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in

them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven -- things which angels desire to look into. 1 Pt 1:10-12

The newness of the New Covenant

Thus Paul is at great pains to explain in his letters that the New Covenant that Christ came to establish in his body meant that everything was new.

Many Reformed theologians, following a flawed Dutch, Covenant theology model, fail to emphasise the newness of the New Covenant. Instead they often state that the New Covenant is merely a new form of administration of the Old; nothing could be further from the truth.

Twelve things are denominated as 'new' in the NT, that are relative to the New Covenant; [12 is the number of covenant, divine government].

- New wine in new wineskins; typological of the New Covenant (Matt 9:17).
- A New Covenant (1 Cor 11:25).
- A new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).
- A new man (Eph 2:15, 4:24).
- A new and living way (Heb 10:20).
- A new heavens and a new earth (2 Pt 3:13; Rev 21:1).
- A new commandment (1 Jn 2:7-8; Jn 13:34).
- A new name (Rev 2:17, 3:12).
- A new Jerusalem (Rev 2:3:12, 21:2).
- A new song (Rev 5:9, 14:3).
- All things new (Rev 21:5; 2 Cor 5:17).

This massive newness that Christ brings in must denominate a separation from the Old Covenant that went before. Indeed, John's Gospel emphasises this: 'the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,' (Jn 1:17). The New Covenant of Christ brings, 'of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace,' (Jn 1:16). This grace enables New Covenant people to tread a 'a new and living way' (Heb 10:19-20); indeed they are encouraged to come boldly in this new way (which is Christ himself, established in his blood).

Thus, unlike the minor change of administration proposed by Covenant Theologians, the change is enormous. The chief component that is different is the gift of the Holy Spirit outpoured upon all saints in Christ.

It is in respect of the outpoured Spirit, and the twelve new things, that NT saints are greater than OT saints. The kingdom of God is where the New Covenant prevails. It is where Christ is in his people.

As the kingdom was just Christ when he was on earth, now the kingdom is all the people in Christ now that he is in heaven.

The big change is that the elect people in the New Covenant are in Christ by the Spirit. That was not the case in the OT; they awaited that great change to come with the cross.

Knowing the Messiah

'All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.' Then He turned to *His* disciples and said privately, 'Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen *it*, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard *it*.' Lk 10:22-24

Jesus is speaking here of his own life and ministry. The disciples had known the Messiah / Son of God personally and witnessed his teaching and miracles. In the OT many prophets and kings, men anointed by God to serve him, had longed to see the day of the Messiah but had not done so. These disciples, chosen by God, had been privileged to see the ministry of the Messiah. In this sense these disciples were more privileged than Moses, Samuel, Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, David, and Solomon.

An aside here is that the focus of Reformed theologians on the Old Covenant usually involves a restriction of singing only Psalms in worship. This is part of the misunderstanding about the importance of the New Covenant. Since the NT itself tells us that Christ should have the pre-eminence, and that saints should look to him, it is astounding that men claiming to be faithful to Christ forbid the saints to sing songs that name Christ himself. This alone proves that this restriction of singing is wrong.

One of the great benefits of being in the New Covenant is that saints know Jesus. They have detailed knowledge about him from the Gospels; they know his teaching from the whole of the NT; they can sing to him directly in worship and they pray to the Father in his name. The OT saints could do none of these things.

Sins covered and sins remitted

The theological word 'atonement' can be effectively summarised as, 'satisfaction for sin'. However, the root Hebrew meaning is 'cover' and in the OT sins were covered. This means that they were removed from God's eyes and hidden. The word 'atonement' appears 99 times (plus 'atone', once; 'atoned', once) in the OT but never in the NT. Thus, poetically,

You have forgiven the iniquity of your people; you have covered all their sin. Ps 85:2

You have cast all my sins behind your back. Isa 38:17

I will not remember your sins. Isa 43:25

Their sin I will remember no more. Jer 31:34

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Mic 7:19

In other words, sin was put away by faith in God's word, expressed in the ritual sacrifices, and placed somewhere where it had no effect. Yet the sins were not actually remitted and obliterated in wrath because no human being had died and paid for them at that point. The blood of animal sacrifices cannot take away sin:

'To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?' Says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats'. Isa 1:11

For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Heb 10:4

Only when the Son of God came and took away the sins of his people were they actually remitted.

Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Heb 9:12-15

Eternal redemption only came with Christ; before that was a temporary, potential redemption that awaited the appearance of Christ for its fulfilment. God's people had the acceptance of God's favour based upon faith in what would happen later.

The redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed. Rm 3:24-25

In the OT sins were passed over, but under the New Covenant they are obliterated by the blood of Christ. The full penalty of our sins was suffered by Christ at a point in time. Before that time they were covered; after that time they were propitiated and eternal redemption brought in.

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Heb 2:17

He Himself is the propitiation for our sins. 1 Jn 2:2

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. 1 Jn 4:10

Furthermore, the blood of animals, while it focused faith on God's coming deliverance, could not actually cleanse the conscience.

Both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience. Heb 9:9

For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? Heb 9:13-14

But the New Covenant believer has had his conscience cleansed by the blood of Christ: Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. Heb 10:22

The Israelite could be ritually cleansed to serve God faithfully, but could never put off the old nature and walk in the Spirit.

So, the experience of the saints under the Old Covenant, while satisfactory for their dispensation, was not the same as experienced by those under the New Covenant. NT saints know the fulness of eternal redemption and the removal of sins, permanently, by the blood of Christ.

Looking forward to the kingdom

By faith Abraham ... waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God. Heb 11:8-10

Abraham knew the Gospel and saw Christ (Jn 8:56; Gal 3:8). In fact, the Gospel hope is only the fulfilment of God's covenant promise to Abraham reaching all nations.

As a recipient of the Gospel, Abraham looked forward to the kingdom. He was fully aware that the kingdom was not going to be experienced on this fleshly earth today, but was for a future dispensation when heaven was on earth. This explains some of Abraham's actions.

For instance, Abraham let Lot choose the best lands. Now Lot was not sent out of Ur by God, was not chosen by God and from his loins came two of Israel's enemies.⁵ But Abraham cared nothing for this world and let his nephew have the best lands. He understood that the fulness of God's promise to him was not in this world but in the next; he awaited the resurrection:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

Heb 11:8-10

If Abraham thought that God's promise of being the king of many nations was for this earth, he would have built a city instead of living in tents. This was the mistake his father made. Terah was also not called by God⁶ but Abraham convinced him to leave Ur. Indeed, Abraham had to learn to do without his father to accomplish God's promise and that was why he had to wait until his father died.

Now Terah was grief stricken by the loss of his other son, Haran, and thus when he was still in Chaldea (having left Ur), he built a city and named it Haran after his son.⁷ Terah did not see what Abraham saw regarding the resurrection.

So Abraham had no earthly, material inheritance on this earth, 'And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on,' (Acts 7:5); yet God had promised that he would be the father of many nations. Abraham looked to the heavenly city and not an earthly one. He knew that the kingdom was of heaven and not earth; of the future and not the present.

Tasting the kingdom after the ascension

I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God. Lk 9:27

This means that the kingdom of God was not seen in its full expression at that time. Jesus' ministry was a taste of what the kingdom was but it would not be a full expression of the kingdom until it involved men. During Jesus' ministry the kingdom was Christ alone and he modelled what the kingdom would mean when expanded to include the elect.

Here Jesus explains that this expansion of the kingdom to the whole church would come during the lifetime of men present at that time. This is what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church at Pentecost not long afterwards.

The birth of the kingdom foretold

And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, *that kingdom* will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And *as* the toes of the feet *were* partly of iron and partly of clay, *so* the kingdom shall be partly

⁵ 'Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. And the younger, she also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the people of Ammon to this day' Gen 19:36-38.

⁶ Acts 7:3.

⁷ Gen 11:26-32; Acts 7:2-5.

strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. 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 2:40-44

The fourth kingdom of the vision that Daniel is interpreting is the Roman Empire, which overtook those that went before, particularly the Greek (Macedonian) Empire that preceded it. The iron and clay speaks of the division inherent within this empire.

It is said that it was in the days of these kings (Roman Emperors) that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed. This, of course, is the kingdom established by Christ, which began in the days of Emperor Augustus.

Thus prophecy was correctly fulfilled, but it also tells us the period when the kingdom is 'set up'. Therefore, the kingdom of God was established during the Roman Empire at the time of Christ.

It is important to understand that Jesus' teaching about the 'kingdom' relates to the establishment of the genuine rule of God in men that is spiritual, righteous and eternal in character. That is, a body of people in which God rules absolutely and perfectly. This could only appear when Christ had brought both redemption from sin and had given the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell saints. This is the reason why there is no mention of the 'Kingdom of God' in the OT.

Yet the OT is full of references to the rule of God (see next). The key characteristic of the OT is the all-embracing rule of the sovereign Lord. There is no abstract notion of a human spiritual kingdom,⁸ rather a focus upon the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh. Any notions about an eternal kingdom had to do with the rule of God from heaven, commanding the affairs of men.⁹ The point of NT teaching about 'kingdom' is heaven experienced on earth.

Jesus tells us when the kingdom began – with his ministry

The law and the prophets *were* until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. Lk 16:16

The concepts of the 'Kingdom of God' or 'the Kingdom of Heaven' are not found in the OT; those phrases do not appear in the English translation in the OT at all.

In the OT we have the truth that God rules all, and that he therefore rules in the kingdom of men:

The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice. Ps 97:1

Heaven rules. Dan 4:26

The Most High ... His kingdom *is* from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and *among* the

⁸ Though there are many references to the Jewish monarchy as a human kingdom.

⁹ There is an irony here. Charismatics, who make much of the concept of 'kingdom', are mostly stuck in Old Covenant forms (e.g. mediatorial leaders [apostles and prophets], loud instrumental music, big gatherings in a large building, formal prophetic ministry, seeking miracles etc. Yet the Old Covenant life had no real concept of the kingdom of God on earth but centred on God's sovereign rule from heaven. Charismatic theology is an absolute mess. It takes the concept of the New Covenant kingdom and applies it with Old Covenant, dead, fleshly forms. In doing so it also denies God's sovereignty, placing the focus on authoritarian men. [See later: 'A practical effect of this'.]

inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' Dan 4:34-35

The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. Dan 5:21

The Kingdom of Israel was a mere type, not the real thing; a shadow of what was truly to come. As Israel had a human king, so God in human form would also have an earthly monarchy in Christ. The king of Israel was merely a delegated authority representing God's kingship over a small country; but even this was not performed righteously and the monarchy failed. The country apostatised from God over and over again. This was to demonstrate that man cannot inherit the kingdom, only the Son of God can.

Thus, in the OT we see God as king, ruling over the earth. Israel is a small type of God's rule where his law is supposed to be performed and his will done, alone amongst a world full of sinners and rebels; but Israel failed. There was never a genuine kingdom of God in operation in the OT where God's will was performed righteously. Entrance to the kingdom was only by righteousness ('For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven', Matt 5:20).

The preaching of the real kingdom of God, where there is a human expression of the will of God in a redeemed people in Christ, could only begin with the incarnation and ministry of the Messiah. Even the Jews of the time realised that the kingdom of God would only arrive with the Messiah (Lk 17:20, 19:11).

Thus Jesus said that in his ministry the kingdom has come near to people (Lk 10:9, 11, 11:20). It began when John's ministry had finished paving the way for the Messiah. John is the end of the OT dispensation and Jesus is the beginning of the new. The kingdom is only associated with the New Covenant that Christ brings in with his death, resurrection, ascension and glorification. Only in Christ is the kingdom fulfilled and only those in Christ are part of the kingdom.

The portal to the kingdom is resurrection. Christ inherited all the promises of the OT (especially those given to Abraham) as a result of resurrection as a man; many of these regarded kingship and the sceptre. It is only after Christ died to cleanse the elect and give them eternal life that they could participate in both the Spirit and his kingdom. The kingdom is only available to those who are born again, regenerated by the power of Christ's Spirit.

This is another reason why the kingdom could not be experienced until Christ came; entrance required resurrection, sharing in the resurrection of Christ.

The kingdom is internal not external

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.' Lk 17:20-21

Observation of external laws does not constitute the kingdom; thus religious observance of the Mosaic Law by Jews did not mean that the kingdom was actually in existence in Israel. It was not, except in typological form. Note that this also means that those Dispensational ideas of a future kingdom of heaven in a millennium, based upon Jewishness and Jewish religious observance of the law is a fallacy.

Jesus explains that the kingdom is internal; it is 'within you'. Now some explain this away by suggesting that *entos* means 'among' instead of within; but this is not tenable.¹⁰ The fine, late exegete, George Beasley-Murray, made the point that most lexicons (except Bauer) only recognise one meaning for *entos* ('within') and that such has been the interpretation in the church for centuries and is reflected in most of the early versions.¹¹

Now this verse has been used by mystics for centuries, and is also purloined by modern cults (such as Transcendental Meditation), to teach subjective introspection in any man (diving deep to find 'God' within); but this is not what Jesus is teaching. As we have already seen, the kingdom is Christ and it only appears in people who have been regenerated and filled with the Spirit to that they can perfectly obey God in the new man. The rule of God is only seen in those who obey God's law and this is only possible in Christ by the Spirit. Human fleshly attempts to fulfil the law fail miserably, but those in Christ can fulfil the Law of Christ by the Spirit.

In Paul's terminology it is, 'the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,' (Rm 14:17). The kingdom does not come by religious observance, such as by eating certain foods and only drinking certain beverages. No, it comes through righteousness, which arises from a prior work of the Spirit.

The kingdom is the reign of Christ within a believer so that he manifests this perfect rule of God in his life. This is the precursor of the perfect rule of God over the whole earth at the end.

Christians have come into the kingdom and share in its initial benefits

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Heb 12:22-28

The Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. Gal 4:26

For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of

¹⁰ 'Within you' 'is the obvious, and, as I think, the necessary meaning of *entos*. The examples cited of the use of *entos* in Xenophon and Plato where *entos* means "among" do not bear that out when investigated. Field (Ot. Norv.) "contends that there is no clear instance of *entos* in the sense of among" (Bruce), and rightly so. What Jesus says to the Pharisees is that they, as others, are to look for the kingdom of God within themselves, not in outward displays and supernatural manifestations. It is not a localised display "Here" or "There." It is in this sense that in Lu 11:20 Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God as "come upon you", speaking to Pharisees. The only other instance of *entos* in the N.T. (Mt 23:26) necessarily means "within" ("the inside of the cup").' Robertson's Word Pictures.

¹¹ Beasley-Murray; *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, Eerdmans/Paternoster, p101; though he twists this later (p102, 'within man's reach and power to enter'). I differ from my late friend here in that he restricts the kingdom to an eschatological event of the rule of God on earth and dismisses a prior event of the immanence of God in the human spirit (p101). I maintain that it means both. The kingdom in the believer is this prototype and earnest of the kingdom that will be consummated at the end in the whole earth.

God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Eph 2:18-22

In our current experience there is a ‘now and not yet’ character to kingdom living. We have the potential of the kingdom but not the fulness (see next point). This is why all Charismatic claims to fulness of kingdom expression (in supposed miracles) are false. The material benefits of the kingdom come later.

However, we are now citizens of God’s kingdom. We do not wait for heaven to be a citizen, we are one now because we are in Christ. The kingdom is filled with resurrected people and though we do not have a resurrected body, we have a resurrected spirit, which qualifies us to be a citizen of heaven. We are not foreigners to the kingdom, we are really in the kingdom as citizens. Our citizenship is in Christ – who is the kingdom.

Thus we have come to Mt. Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem. The church is in Christ, the Firstborn, and is registered as a citizen in heaven. Jesus is the Mediator of a new covenant, and those who are in the covenant are also in the kingdom. Covenant life is kingdom life. Those in grace are also citizens of heaven.

The corollary is also true. Those who are not in grace, not in the covenant, not in Christ, cannot be in the kingdom. No human being is in the kingdom. No earthly nation is in the kingdom.

Yet Christians also seek the consummation of the kingdom at the end

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.’

Jn 18:36

For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Heb 13:14

In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. Jn 14:2-3

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Phil 3:20

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.’ Rev 21:2-3

The kingdom of God is not earthly, fleshly or material and cannot be consummated in this world today. All claims that the kingdom is here in fulness are false, as are the claims of a future, earthly, millennial, Jewish kingdom. The kingdom cannot be fully manifested in a material world.

The reason why the kingdom is here in part is because heaven is here in part. Grace is glory begun and so those who are in Christ share in heavenly benefits in their spirit, in the new man. Thus some spiritual aspects of the kingdom are present in believers, but not in any material sense.

Thus fellowship with God, abiding in Christ, walking in the Spirit, knowing justification and adoption, receiving the benefits of redemption, growing in grace, knowing the mind of God – these are all spiritual aspects of kingdom life which we can enjoy in this world

because they are not material. However, material benefits of the kingdom (such as freedom from sin, everlasting life) can only be fully known when heaven and earth are the same after the Day of Judgment.

The fulness of the kingdom is when God dwells with man physically in the new world where heaven and earth are one. Revelation 21 pictures this symbolically. This occurs after the return of Christ to take his own out of this world, which will then be burned up and restored to perfection.

So, with Christ the kingdom came into this world spiritually. It was in Christ alone. After the resurrection and ascension, the indwelling of the Spirit enabled believers to be part of the kingdom, which resides in the spiritual man. But only after the end does the kingdom come in material form when God dwells with redeemed men on earth and the whole earth is the city of God.

Salvation is revealed at the end

Salvation belongs to those in the kingdom. The kingdom is a realm of salvation. Those who obey the rule of God are the ones that God has saved.

Now salvation is something experienced by all Christians; every believer can claim to have been saved. But the conception of salvation held by many Christians is far too small. It comprehends glory and Christ-likeness, and these will not be fully experienced until the end. Matthew Henry said that, '*grace is glory begun*', and so it is; we have a taste of future glory. However, we will not fully experience that glory until the Second Coming and even then we will only begin to understand the early stages of salvation. As Paul said, '*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him,*' (1 Cor 2:9).

Peter also explained that the full revelation of salvation is in the future:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Pt 1:3-5

Salvation is 'reserved in heaven' for us; it is fully 'revealed' at the end. What we know now is only a taste of the fulness of salvation. Salvation is an inheritance (in Christ) that is undefiled, awaiting us in heaven. Thus grace is to be brought to us at the revelation of Christ at the Second Coming.

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Pt 1:13

Now we know much about grace already, but there is a large part of grace that is yet to be experienced. For a start, we cannot know the fulness of grace and salvation without a new material body that is glorious and holy.

So, salvation is a part of the kingdom and the fulness of salvation is only experienced at the end.

The kingdom taken away from Israel

Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder. Matt 21:43-44

One repercussion of the proper expression of the kingdom being in Christ alone (and thus the church in Christ) is that there is no longer any fleshly expression of God's kingdom in Israel. The kingdom was never meant to be solely Jewish but open to all nations¹² and in the body of Christ this universalism prevails. Any focusing upon the Kingdom as being strictly Jewish is a grave sin and a serious error.¹³

To make this absolutely clear, the Lord himself says that the kingdom would be taken from Jews and given to others (the elect in Christ). The kingdom in Israel was only typical, being centred in the monarchy as a type of Christ's royal power, but even this would now be taken away. As all the types vanish when the anti-type (Christ) comes,¹⁴ so the kingdom is cancelled as being in any way Jewish, even just as a type.

A practical effect of this

The realm of the OT was based upon external things in the saint's relationship with God. Thus fellowship with God was mediated by priests performing sacrifices to cleanse the way of sinners to fellowship with God. But the expression of God's mind to saints was also external; such as casting lots or the Urim and Thummim. This was often mediated by prophets or angels, but sometimes by subjective things like dreams and visions. Signs, wonders and miracles were also widely used by God to draw people's attention to something important.

All these things were characteristic of the Old Covenant¹⁵ and OT dispensation. Thus people could expect to hear absolute words from a known prophet, or see a vision, or meet an angel. These methods were used because the saints of God did not have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. God was symbolically in their midst in the Tabernacle or temple, but was not dwelling in their hearts. The very presence of the external things that symbolised God's presence (the Ark, the temple, the Tabernacle) existed because God was not yet in the hearts of people.

Under the New Covenant, and as a result of the baptism of the Spirit (which placed all the elect into Christ) and the sealing of the Spirit (which caused the Spirit to indwell saints), the whole Trinity now resided in the hearts of men.

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Cor 4:6

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Eph 3:17

***You are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart. 2 Cor 3:3**

God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts. Gal 4:6

As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among *them*. I will be their God, and they shall be My people'. 2 Cor 6:16

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts. 1 Pt 3:15

¹² Gen 17:4-6, 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.'

¹³ As in Dispensationalism and Jewish Root theology.

¹⁴ Thus there is no need of sacrifices, High Priest or a physical temple since Christ is the fulness of all that these types pointed to.

¹⁵ The Old Covenant period began with Moses on Sinai. The Patriarchal period was different.

This is vitally important to understand and act upon. God dwells in his saints without any intermediary. It is for this reason that all saints are priests and kings before God and need no intermediary:

For *there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.* 1 Tim 2:5

But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. 1

Pt 2:9

And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. Rev 1:6

Now this means that most of the practices in the established churches, and particularly Charismatic churches, are false. For instance:

Any leader who sets himself up as a mediator between God and the saints is a liar and a charlatan. This indeed is a serious sin and a blasphemy. Thus all popes, archbishops, bishops, priests, vicars, and so on, are false ministries. But also all Charismatic apostles and prophets that claim to hear from God and interpret it to the people are equally false.

It also means that all the hopes and aspirations of Charismatics for their signs and wonders ministries are false. That age has gone for something better. All those seeking visions, dreams, or seeking to be an OT type of authoritarian prophet, plus all those focused on signs and miracles, are stuck in the Old Covenant. Equally, all those hoping to meet angels.

We do not need these sorts of communications from heaven if we actually have the Trinity already living within us! What is wrong with people that seek these sensational but defunct things of the flesh?

The staggering problem today is that people are not truly seeking God but are seeking to stimulate the flesh. They want the excitement of some external, flashy sign but can't be bothered to learn about God directly.

The way we communicate and learn from God is personal. We do this by fellowshiping with God daily in our quiet times; learning from his word and praying for his help to understand it. There is no need of an angel, a vision or a prophet when we have God's own thoughts in Scripture, and his Spirit to lead us into all truth.

Why would Christians seek something less than God when they can fellowship with God?

It is noteworthy that it is in the very circles, that seek signs, wonders and prophecy, that there is very little real studying of Scripture. Most people in these circles do not even know what the real Gospel is. I have met people who have been stuck in such churches for 40 years and only learned what the Gospel really is when they left and started ardently studying Scripture. Shame on leaders who preside over such false churches.

Conclusion

In the OT God's elect lived in types of the kingdom of God, such as the kingdom ruled by David; but the kingdom of God came formally with the incarnation of Christ. With Jesus a man lived on earth who fully obeyed God and was thus the only representative of the kingdom. Christ is, essentially, the kingdom.

However, after the ascension of Christ, the Holy Spirit was outpoured on the church as the Lord commanded, at his coronation as king, and all the elect were placed into the body of

Christ by the Spirit. OT saints were never, actually, in the body of Christ, only potentially destined to be so and considered by God as such. The New Covenant church was also filled and indwelled by the Spirit, something not possible until Christ was glorified.

The indwelling of the Spirit, and being in the body of Christ, means that the NT church is also the kingdom. The inhabitants of the kingdom of God are the elect who have the Spirit in them.

Therefore, the expansion of the kingdom beyond Christ comes at Pentecost. Before Pentecost it was only Christ, after Pentecost it is the whole church. So we can say that the kingdom came at Pentecost in spiritual form; but there are many aspects of the kingdom as yet unfulfilled. For instance, the earth is full of rebellious kingdoms loyal to God's enemy.

The final expression of the kingdom is when Jesus returns and ends all things, creating a new heaven and a new earth. The saints dwell on the new earth and this is then the final expression of the kingdom; the place where Christ is king over a material creation that worships him and shares his glory.

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