

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART XXX

by Andy Woods

We began scrutinizing New Testament texts that "kingdom now" theologians employ in an attempt to argue that the kingdom is a present reality to show that none of these passages teach a present, spiritual form of the kingdom. We began examining the typical texts from Acts used by "kingdom now" theologians.

JESUS CURRENTLY REIGNING ON DAVID'S THRONE?

Perhaps the primary reason advanced by "kingdom now" theologians in their attempt to equate God's present work in the church with a present manifestation of the Messianic kingdom is that following His Ascension, Christ supposedly took His seat on David's Throne in heaven. From this regal position He now orchestrates the spiritual kingdom through the church. However, it is better to reject the notion that the Davidic Kingdom is present in any sense today and instead to maintain that this kingdom will not be inaugurated until the millennial age. At least *six* reasons support this conclusion.

First, we noted that the Old Testament consistently depicts the Davidic Throne in terrestrial rather than celestial terms. *Second*, we noted that because of this scriptural portrayal of the Davidic Throne, to argue that the Davidic Throne is now manifesting itself in this age from heaven is to contort the notions of progress of revelation and literal or normal, grammatical, historical hermeneutics. *Third*, no New Testament verse or passage, including those frequently appealed to in early Acts, clearly puts Christ on David's Throne in the present age. *Fourth*, the prophet Daniel made it clear that the Davidic, Messianic kingdom could not come until the kingdoms of man had run their course (Dan. 2; 7). Unfortunately, kingdom now theologians ignore this chronology by arguing for a present, spiritual form of the kingdom despite the fact

that the kingdoms of man have not yet run their course, the Antichrist and his kingdom have not yet been overthrown, and the Second Advent has not yet occurred. *Fifth*, because the church is an unrevealed mystery to the Old Testament writers (Eph 3:9), it is wholly unrelated to the Davidic Covenant and Kingdom. *Sixth*, God's present work through the church can best be described as a parenthesis or interlude in between God's past work with Israel (the first 69 weeks of Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks) and God's future work with Israel (the 70th week). Because the Davidic Covenant and Kingdom specifically concerns Israel rather than the church, the Davidic Covenant and Kingdom could not be fulfilled in any sense during the present Church Age.

It is for these preceding *six* reasons, that the Dispensational tradition has never confused Christ's present session with the Davidic Kingdom. The only exception to this rule is the modern advent of Progressive Dispensationalism, which maintains that the Davidic Kingdom is present in spiritual form as Jesus now reigns from David's Throne from heaven over the church. While still holding to a future or "not yet" earthly reign of Christ following Christ's Second Advent, Progressive Dispensationalists still argue that the Davidic Kingdom is "already" here in spiritual form. However, because of this radical alteration in understanding Christ's present activity, many question whether this new theological approach legitimately deserves the title "Dispensationalism." The question typically posed is whether Progressive Dispensationalism represents a bonafide development within the Dispensational tradition or a significant departure from it altogether?¹ After conducting an in-depth survey of classical and Revised Dispensationalists as well as opponents of Dispensationalism, Nichols observes:

Although the progressive dispensationalists are careful to express their commitment to a future for ethnic Israel and a future, literal fulfillment of Israel's covenant promise, these views concerning the

inaugural fulfillment of Old Testament promise, especially that of the Davidic covenant, and the redefining of the present form of the church mark an aberration from normative dispensationalism. The consistently held offer, rejection, postponement, and fully future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom is absent from their teaching.²

Thus, Nichols concludes:

From the perspective of dispensational tradition, the current landscape of progressive dispensationalists appears to be a different terrain. The view of the offer, rejection, postponement, and fully future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom and the corollary view of the church as something different and distinct is and has been the consistent view of normative dispensationalism. By viewing the present form of the church as an inaugural stage of the Davidic kingdom with Christ seated on the Davidic throne in heaven, the progressive dispensational position has distanced itself from this distinguishing feature of dispensationalism. *The* distinguishing feature of dispensationalism, i.e., the consistent distinction between Israel and the church, is all but absent. Consequently, the legitimacy of calling PD part of the dispensational tradition is questionable.³

Lightner similarly remarks, "Many who are classic dispensationalists—and even those who are not dispensationalists at all—question why those who no longer believe in the foundational essentials of dispensationalism still want to be part of the dispensationalism family. This is truly something not yet revealed."⁴ Lightner elsewhere defines Progressive Dispensationalism as:

The term used by those who still wish to be called dispensationalists but who do not believe some of the basic essentials of dispensationalism. They do not believe God has a program for Israel and one for the church. They believe that Christ is presently on the throne of David in heaven and the Davidic kingdom is being fulfilled now in part.⁵

THE APOSTLES PREACHED THE KINGDOM IN ACTS

Beyond the argument from early Acts that Jesus is now reigning on David's Throne from heaven, "kingdom now" theologians also rely upon the handful of references to the "kingdom" scattered throughout Acts indicating that the apostles "preached the things concerning the kingdom of God." Interestingly, the Greek term *basileia* typically translated "kingdom of God"

appears eight times in Acts (1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). However, all of these passages fail to define exactly what is meant by the use of the term "kingdom." Thus, the term must be understood in light of what has preceded in the progress of divine revelation. Because, as explained throughout this series, "kingdom" always carries a technical meaning connoting a terrestrial element of Christ the King reigning over a repentant Israel from Jerusalem, these scant references to the kingdom in Acts must also be understood in a futuristic, terrestrial sense rather than strictly in a present, spiritual sense. McClain's analysis of these verses is significant:

The term "kingdom" (Grk. *basileia*) occurs eight times in Acts as referring to the divine rule...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 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.⁶

It is also worth noting how few references there are to the word "kingdom" in Acts in comparison to Luke's prequel to Acts (Luke 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? As explained earlier in this series, the Gospels record the offer of the kingdom to national Israel (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:5-7; Luke 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 Acts transpire, the kingdom is 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. Toussaint well explains:

It is difficult to explain why Luke does not use the term if the kingdom is being inaugurated. He employs it forty-five times in the gospel...one would expect Luke to use the word if such a startling thing as the inauguration of the kingdom had taken place. 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.⁷

(To Be Continued...)

¹ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 178.

² Stephen Nichols, "The Dispensational View of the Davidic Kingdom: A Response to Progressive Dispensationalism," in *The Master's Perspective on Biblical Prophecy*, ed. Mayue and Thomas, Master's Perspective Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 54.

³ Stephen Nichols, "The Dispensational View of the Kingdom: A Response to Progressive Dispensationalism," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 7 (Fall 1996): 238.

⁴ Robert Lightner, *Last Days Handbook* (Nashville: Nelson, 1997), 211.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁶ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 424-26.

⁷ 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.