



## THE KINGDOM OF GOD— POSTPONED OR PRESENT?

As Jesus began his public ministry, he said: “The TIME is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is AT HAND: repent and believe the gospel” (Mk. 1:15).

Many Christians believe the setting up of the kingdom is still in the future—that it will occur at what is commonly called the *second* coming of Christ. But, if that is correct, how can we explain Christ’s message 2,000 years ago: that the TIME was fulfilled and the kingdom was AT HAND—*back then*?

To answer this question, some believe what has been called “The Postponement Theory.” They believe that Christ intended to set up his kingdom at that time. But when the Jews rejected him, he went to the cross, and the kingdom was POSTPONED until a future day.

Here are some representative quotes: “The Jews rejected Christ their King, and the kingdom was postponed,” “He would have set up the kingdom, but they rejected and crucified Him,” “Messiah’s kingdom ... was rejected so was postponed until Christ comes to set up the Kingdom,” etc.

Did Christ really think the kingdom was AT HAND and that the Jews would accept him—but was MISTAKEN? Or, did he know the Jews would reject him, that the kingdom would be POSTPONED, that it wasn’t really AT HAND—but *he went ahead and preached this message anyhow*?

Statements to the effect that “the Jews rejected the kingdom, SO Christ went to the cross,” if taken at face value, would imply that Calvary was some last minute arrangement! But the scriptures, such as Isaiah 53, had explained that Christ would die. Without his death, the scriptures could not be fulfilled (Matt. 26:54). He was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). “Those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he has so fulfilled” (Acts 4:28). “The prophets and Moses did say that Christ should suffer” (Acts 26:22,23), etc.

It is not our intention to cast any reflection upon the sincerity of those who teach

the postponement view. But we find it strained and unnecessary. We believe there is a better explanation. It is simply this: Christ came to set up the kingdom and HE DID WHAT HE CAME TO DO! His kingdom became a reality—not as a worldly, political, Jewish-type kingdom—but a *spiritual* kingdom. *SO*:

When John the Baptist preached, “The kingdom of heaven is AT HAND” (Matt. 3:2), he was not mistaken!

When Jesus said, “The TIME is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is AT HAND” (Mark 1:15), he provided a valid time frame regarding the kingdom!

When the Twelve, following Jesus’ instructions, preached, “The kingdom of heaven is AT HAND” (Matt. 10:7), they were not wrong!

When Jesus sent out the Seventy, he told them to preach, “The kingdom of God is come NEAR unto you” (Luke 10:9, 11), they were not talking about a postponed kingdom!

When we read in Scripture: “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say...the kingdom of heaven is AT HAND” (Matt. 4:17), this was a true statement!

While many of the Jews expected a literal kingdom of pomp and political power which would exalt them and put down their enemies, what *they* thought is not necessarily a sound basis for doctrine (Acts 13:27). If the kingdom Christ offered was one of Jewish supremacy with the pomp and glory of David and Solomon—the very thing the Jews wanted—then surely THEY WOULD HAVE ACCEPTED IT. They hated Roman tyranny. On one occasion Jesus purposely escaped so that they would NOT attempt to make him an earthly king! (John 6:15).

There was a reason for this. As Jesus said: “My kingdom is not *of* this world: if my kingdom were *of* this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews” (John 18:36). Because his kingdom was a *spiritual* kingdom, it would not advance by the sword or with carnal weapons, but through the preaching of the gospel whereby lives are changed and people come to acknowledge Christ as king.

The Pharisees, who thought of the kingdom as a literal, earthly kingdom that would

appear in all the glamour of military might, demanded of Jesus “when the kingdom of God should come” (Lk. 17:20). To this he replied: “The kingdom of God comes not with observation [outward show]: neither shall they say, ‘Lo here!’ or, ‘lo there!’ for, behold, the kingdom of God is *within* you” (verse 21)—obviously not the *outward* type of kingdom they expected.

The word here translated “within” (Strong’s 1789) appears in one other verse: “Cleanse first that which is *within* the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matt. 23:26). The point is that true spirituality comes from within, from the heart (cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26,27).

Toward the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, as he neared Jerusalem, there were some of his own followers who supposed “the kingdom of God should immediately appear” (Lk. 19:11). Not understanding the spiritual nature of the kingdom, they may have believed that upon his arrival at Jerusalem he would proclaim himself king, that it would be with military might, horses, chariots, and armored soldiers.

But the kingdom of Christ, being a spiritual kingdom, would not be outward so that people would say it is here or there. It would be “like a treasure *hid* in a field” (Matt. 13:44)—not obvious on the surface. It would grow *gradually* over the centuries as the Lord would add to it, and so it did not “immediately appear” (Lk. 19:11). It would conquer progressively, growing stronger and more powerful as the gospel goes forth. This spread of “the kingdom of heaven” would have a small beginning, like a *mustard seed*, but in time grow to an enormous size (Matt. 13:31,32). It would be like *leaven* which a woman placed in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened (verse 33). It would be like a “stone,” small in comparison, that would grow until it became a “mountain,” filling the whole earth! (Dan. 2:35).

Some who hold the postponement teaching oppose anyone today praying or reciting “The Lord’s Prayer.” They believe this prayer was postponed and is not to be prayed until a “Jewish remnant” does so during “the great tribulation period,” after the “church” is gone. *Then* they will pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in

heaven,” for then, according to their belief, the kingdom will be at hand—*finally!*

But if we carefully—step by step—look at the wording of The Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13), we can come to a better understanding of the *timing* involved. We will use the familiar wording of the KJV:

“*Our Father which art in heaven.*” The Father was in heaven. That was a fact then, as all agree, and did not await or depend on some future fulfillment.

“*Hallowed be thy name.*” This also had a present-tense meaning. God’s name was to be honored and praised.

“*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*”

“*Give us this day our daily bread.*” When? *This day.* It is clearly stated. No one takes this to mean a future, final, eternal state. It is *now*—in this life—that we need daily bread.

“*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*” Again, obviously, these words do not describe a future state. Praying for forgiveness and forgiving others refers to this life, not an age to come.

“*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*” It is *now*, in this life, we face temptation and evil.

“*For thine IS*”—we should not read over this!—“*for thine IS the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*”

Unless we separate the words “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” from the rest of The Lord’s Prayer, this part of the prayer also had a valid meaning at that time. But there is more proof as we consider *context*. A few verses after Luke’s account of The Lord’s Prayer, Jesus was casting out demons. Commenting on this activity, he explained (Luke 11:20):

“If I with *the finger of God...*”—a common Hebrew expression that went clear back to the time of Moses (Exod. 8:19)—“If I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God IS come upon you” (KJV).

All translations say basically the same thing, with slight differences in wording:

“...then the kingdom of God *has come* to you” (NIV).

“...*has arrived* among you” (NLT).

“...*has already come* upon you” (Amplified).

“...*has swept over you here and now*” (Phillips Modern English).

No translation of this verse places the coming of the kingdom 2,000 years in the

future! Obviously, because of Christ, the kingdom was functioning then. As the gospel goes forth, as Satan’s work is defeated, as evil is overcome with good, as the will of God is accomplished, the kingdom of heaven comes to men on earth. It was true then; it is true now.

When Jesus preached the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of heaven was at hand, a glorious new era was about to be ushered in for the people of God. He was not saying the kingdom was at hand because they were about to *die!* That is a different subject. When we read that people like Joseph of Arimathea “*waited* for the kingdom of God” (Luke 23:51), what they were waiting for was *coming to them*, not that they were *going to it* (cf. Dan. 7:27). That which was at hand was the kingdom OF heaven, not the kingdom IN heaven. Notice how often the present-tense word “IS” appears:

“The kingdom of heaven IS likened unto a man which sowed good seed” (Matt. 13:24).

“The kingdom of heaven IS like unto a mustard seed...” (verse 31).

“The kingdom of heaven IS like unto leaven...” (verse 33).

“The kingdom of heaven IS like unto treasure...” (verse 44).

“The kingdom of heaven IS like unto a merchant...” (verse 45).

“The kingdom of heaven IS like unto a net...” (verse 47).

“The kingdom of heaven IS like unto a man that is a landowner” (Matt. 20:1).

“The kingdom of heaven IS like unto a certain king” (Matt. 22:2).

“The kingdom of heaven IS as a man traveling into a far country” (Matt. 25:14).

“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself...IS greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4).

“The poor in spirit...theirs IS the kingdom of God” (Mat. 5:3).

“They who are persecuted for righteousness...theirs IS the kingdom of heaven” (verse 10).

“He that IS least in the kingdom of heaven...” (Matt. 11:11).

“If I cast out devils by the Spirit...then the kingdom of God IS come unto you” (Matt. 12:28).

“My kingdom IS...” (John 18:36).

“The kingdom of God IS...righteousness, and peace, and joy” (Rom. 14:17).

“The kingdom of God IS...in power” (1 Cor. 4:20).

With this many verses using “IS,” it would be strained, in our view, to teach the kingdom had been postponed for 2,000 years!

In Luke 16:16 we read: “The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the

kingdom of God is preached, and every man *presses* into it.” How could people press into something that was not in existence or was postponed for 2,000 years?

Jesus reproved the scribes and Pharisees: “For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for you neither go in yourselves, neither do you allow *them that are entering to go in*” (Matt. 23:13). “You have taken away the key of knowledge: you entered not in yourselves, and them that were *entering in* you hindered” (Luke 11:52).

All Christians agree that by receiving Christ we enter into life now—in this life. But it should be carefully noted that entering into life and entering into the kingdom are the same thing. The terms are used interchangeably: “It is better to *enter into life*...it is better to *enter into the kingdom of God*” (Mark 9:43-49). The fact that some who might pluck out an eye or cut off a limb would, in this condition, enter into life (the kingdom), shows that *the present life* is in view. No one believes that a person in heaven, having a glorified body, will be minus an eye, leg, or arm!

When Jesus told one man he was “not far from the kingdom of God” (Matt. 12:34), the implication is that the kingdom was something one could enter in this life. This man was getting close.

The testimony of the early Christians was that God “has delivered us from the power of darkness, and HAS translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13). If we had no other verse, this would certainly justify believing that the kingdom of Christ is a *present reality!*

Writing to churches in the first century, John said that Christ “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God” (Rev. 1:6, KJV). But most translations use the word kingdom: “...has made us a *kingdom*, priests unto God” (NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB, ASV, ERV, WEB, WEYMOUTH, etc.).

John goes on to say: “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in TRIBULATION, and in the KINGDOM...of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9). If John was “in the kingdom,” the kingdom had obviously been set up and he had entered it! He knew nothing of a postponed kingdom. Ironically, suffering persecution, he was in the kingdom and tribulation—*both at the same time!*

The prophet Daniel provided a *time frame* within which the kingdom of God would be

set up. “*In the days of these kings* shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people....it shall stand forever” (Dan. 2:44).

In a dream, Nebuchadnezzar had seen an image with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet of iron and clay. A stone smote the image upon its feet, the whole image was broken up, and the stone became a great mountain filling the whole earth.

The explanation of this dream given by Daniel indicates that the various parts of the image symbolized four empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The stone cut out without hands represented Christ and the impact of his kingdom. It struck into the image in that portion that symbolized the Roman Empire. Obviously, this had to happen *while the Roman empire was still in power!*

The time period for the Roman empire is generally figured as existing from 63 BC to AD 476. So if the kingdom was set up “in the days of these kings”—the kings who reigned over the Roman empire—this rules out the idea that the kingdom would not be set up until centuries *after* the days of those kings!

But there is something else worthy of notice. The book of Daniel is about events involving Daniel’s people, the Jewish people (Dan. 8:24; 9:15-19; 10:14; 11:14; 12:1,7). Consequently, the Gentile kingdoms represented in the great image acquire significance primarily *as they impacted the Jewish people*. (Places like Australia, China, or Russia are not even in the picture.)

The Babylonian empire, under king Nebuchadnezzar, impacted the Jews because of their 70-year captivity. The Medo-Persian empire, under Cyrus, granted their freedom to return to Jerusalem, to build again their city and temple. Later, the Greek empire that came to power, cruelly persecuted the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes, devastating Jerusalem and the temple. And, finally, there was the Roman empire, which ruled over Judea at the time of Jesus and ultimately destroyed Jerusalem, the temple, and the Jewish nation in AD 70.

The feet of the great image were a mixture of iron and clay. The “iron” represented the Roman empire because of its strength and, it seems probable, the “clay” represented the Jewish people. There are verses that specifically speak of Israel as clay: “But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the

clay” (Isa. 64:8). “...as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel” (Jer. 18:4-6).

If the mixture of iron and clay in the feet of the great image did indeed represent that period during which Rome ruled over the Jewish nation, that time frame could not extend beyond AD 70, for at that time the Jewish nation ceased to exist.

In 40 BC, the Roman Senate designated Herod as the “King of the Jews,” who was followed by a succession of Herods ruling over Palestine (Matt. 2:1; 14:1; Acts 12:6, 19, 21). These kings served under the Caesars, a succession of kings in Rome (Matt. 22:17, 21; Luke 3:1; John 19:12; Acts 25:8; 28:19). Putting it all together, then, it seems probable that the kings referred to in Daniel 2:44 were the Herods and Caesars. In the days of “these kings” the God of heaven, in the person of Jesus Christ, did indeed set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

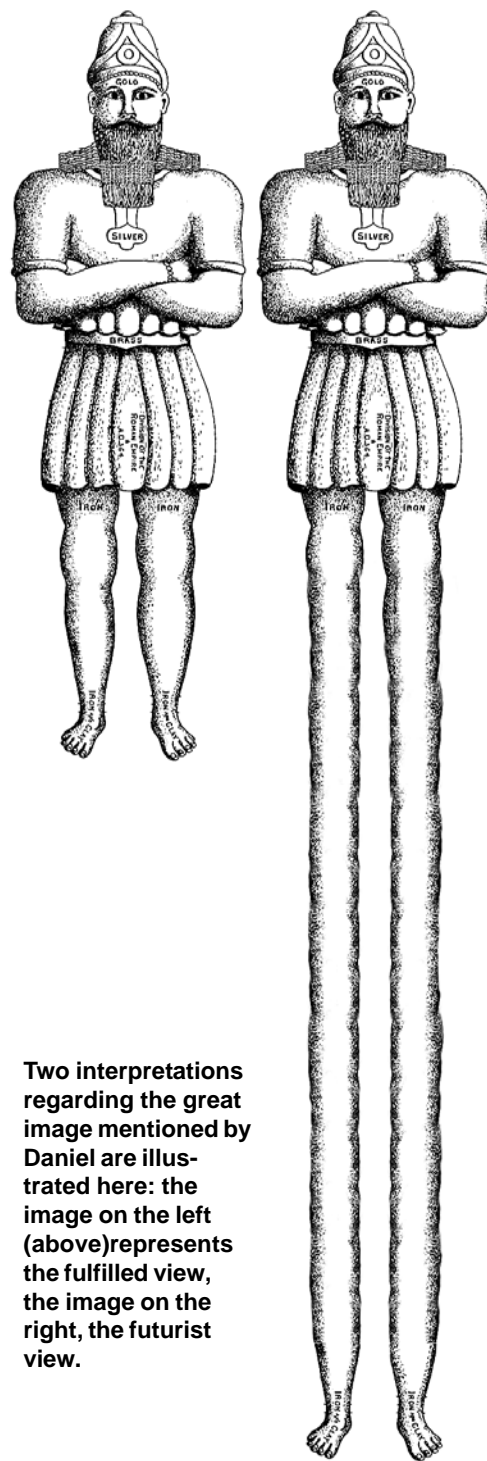
Living on this side of the fulfillment, we know that it was during this era, “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). As he began his public ministry, he preached that the “time” had been fulfilled and the kingdom of God was “at hand” (Mark 1:15). Can there be any doubt, then, comparing scripture with scripture, who the kings were in whose days the kingdom was set up?

But if the futurist view is correct—that the setting up of the kingdom is still future—our futurist friends will need to revise their prophetic charts. They need to s-t-r-e-t-c-h the legs of the great image out a couple thousand years l-o-n-g-e-r to make things fit!

Such stretching reminds me of a preacher I met years ago. He taught that the Vietnam War, which was going on at the time, would lead right into World War III. When it didn’t happen, even years later, he claimed the Vietnam War was “not really over”!

Instead of the kingdom being postponed to the dim, distant future, Jesus said: “There are some standing here *who will not taste death*, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power” (Mk. 9:1). If the kingdom was postponed—and has not yet, after nearly 2,000 years, come with power—those people must be *getting quite old by now!*

To counter this glaring inconsistency, some point out that a few days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on the Mount of Transfiguration. There Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke of Christ’s “decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31; 2 Peter 1:17, 18). But how would



**Two interpretations regarding the great image mentioned by Daniel are illustrated here: the image on the left (above) represents the fulfilled view, the image on the right, the futurist view.**

this be the coming of the kingdom in power? Jesus had said that “*some*” standing there would not see death until.... If he was referring to an event that happened only a few days later, he should have said that “*none*” standing there would see death until this happened! Whatever Jesus meant by “seeing the kingdom come in power,” it had to occur within the lifetime of some of those standing there (cf. Luke 2:26).

We believe the kingdom came in power on the Day of Pentecost. At that time the

followers of Christ were “endued with power from on high” and “received power...to be witnesses in Jerusalem, and Judea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus had said to Peter, “I will build my *church*” and went right on to say, “I will give unto you the keys of the *kingdom* of heaven” (verse 19). Did Peter use those keys? We believe he did. He used the keys to open the kingdom to 3,000 on the day of Pentecost, for people enter the kingdom by conversion (Matt. 18:3). Later Peter took the gospel to the Gentiles and they too entered in. But if the kingdom had been postponed, then Peter would not have been able to use the keys Christ gave him!

Suppose someone promised to purchase a new car for a friend. And, they were given the keys to this car—but *only the keys*. Would not the person receiving the keys ask: “Where is the car?” “Oh, you won’t get the car until much later, but you have the keys.” What purpose would the keys serve if they could not be used?

Jesus invited those who were thirsty to come unto him and drink. And, as a result, from them would flow rivers of living water. “This he spoke concerning the Spirit, who those believing in him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, *because Jesus was not yet glorified*” (John 7:37-39). It follows, then, that when the outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred on the Day of Pentecost, it was a sure sign that Jesus had been glorified in heaven.

Peter, on that occasion, expressed it in these words: “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he poured out this which you now see and

hear...God has made this same Jesus...Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:29-35).

When Christ ascended, God “seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come” (Eph. 1:20-22); or it could also be said, “not only in the age to come, *but in this age also*”!

Having ascended into heaven, Christ “sat down on the right hand of God; from that time waiting till his enemies be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:12,13). We read also that “he must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25,26). He must continue to reign until death is destroyed. Since Paul, in this same chapter, said death will be destroyed by the dead being RESURRECTED, it seems clear that the reign of Christ had to begin BEFORE the resurrection of the dead—not after.

When Jesus came into this world, he was despised and rejected of men. They mocked his kingship. In the words of a gospel song by Ira Stanphill (© 1952):

*There was no crown for him  
of silver or of gold,  
There was no diadem for him to hold.  
But blood adorned his brow,  
and proud its stain he bore,  
and sinners gave to him  
the crown he wore.  
A rugged cross became his throne,  
His kingdom was in hearts alone,  
He wrote his love in crimson red,  
And wore the thorns upon his head.*

But this all changed when he ascended to the Father in heaven, as so many New Testament verses declare. This was also prophesied in the Old Testament. Turning again to Daniel, we will here quote from the

NASB translation, but all translations make the same point:

“And behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came *up* to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a Kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His Kingdom is one which will not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13-14).

It should be carefully noted that Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, was seen coming *up* to the Ancient of Days (Yahweh/Jehovah)—not coming *from* him. In this setting, he was not *descending* in clouds to the earth, but *ascending* with clouds to the Father in heaven. And, having been given a kingdom that all nations might serve him, truly Jesus Christ “IS Lord of lords, and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14).

The kingdom of Christ is described by such terms as salvation, forgiveness, grace, conversion—or as Paul summed it up: “The kingdom IS... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

I have presented here what I believe is the best explanation. If any of our brothers or sisters in Christ may see some of this differently, we think no less of you. It would be foolish and arrogant to claim to have “the final word” or “ultimate revelation” on such things. I have given *many* verses about the kingdom being a *present* reality. These verses, in our view, do not conflict with verses that speak of the *future* aspects of the kingdom. After all, God’s kingdom, being *everlasting*, is both present *and* future—and that future will be GREAT, GRAND, and GLORIOUS!

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