

3. The Kingdom of God in the 21st Century

In the 21st century, some religions teach that Christ failed to set up an earthly kingdom and, having failed, he set up the church until he comes back to reign 1,000 years on earth. All these doctrines summarize under the various millennial (1,000-year reign of Christ on earth) theories. There are millennial, premillennial, and postmillennial reign theories. False allegations abound as the proponents of these doctrines pervert the scriptures to make their cases. Instead of looking to the hundreds of false contentions and allegations made, this lesson will look to the scriptures that expose the false teaching of millennial theories.

Old Testament Prophecies Regarding the Kingdom of God and Christ

The Old Testament was very clear when the true King would reign and his kingdom would come. In his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel made very clear that the eternal kingdom of the Lord would come in the days of the Roman kings: In Dan 2:39-43, Daniel described how four kingdoms in the same class with the Babylonian kingdom would rise one after the other. Only four kingdoms fit this description in all of history: the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Greek, and the Roman kingdoms. In the time of the Roman kingdom, God would set up a kingdom which would last forever:

44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. 45 This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands – a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. Dan 2:44-45.

Nothing ever can destroy this kingdom, it will endure forever; and it is the kingdom of the God in heaven. Such a kingdom set up by God of heaven was to come in the days of the Roman kings. It cannot be in the future for those of us still living, as many contend.

Zechariah, God's inspired representative, wrote about the work of the Messiah. In Zech. 6:12-13, through His prophet Zechariah, God struck a deathblow to the doctrine of millennialism--the doctrine that holds that Christ is yet to come to reign over his kingdom on earth for one thousand years. Zechariah wrote in Zech 6:12-13:

12 Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. 13 It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two."

Premillennialists teach that Christ functions as a priest now, as Heb 4:15 clearly shows, but that he is not reigning as king now. They say that Christ will begin his reign as king when he returns sometime in the future. But Zechariah said, "He shall be a priest upon his throne." At the same time Christ serves as high priest, he sits upon his throne. If Christ is high priest now; he is king now. If he is king now, his kingdom exists now here upon the earth and now in heaven.

God told Zechariah to place two crowns on the head of Joshua, the high priest (Zech. 6:10-11). Joshua, with the two crowns was a type of the Branch—the Christ. The two crowns represent the two positions filled by the true Branch. The two-tiered crown represents the simultaneous kingship and high priesthood of Christ.

Teachings in the Gospels Regarding the Kingdom of God and Christ

Even before the birth of the Lord, the angel Gabriel told Mary that her son would sit upon his throne and reign over his kingdom, which will never end, forever and ever. Luke 1:30-33 leaves no wiggle room for millennialists:

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

In Acts 2, Peter describes the exact fulfillment of this prophecy and the prophecy of Zechariah. Christ sat on David's throne when he rose from the dead. In Acts 2:30-33:

30 But he [David] was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Jesus and John the Baptist taught in the gospels that the kingdom was at hand, coming in the lifetime of those then living.

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Matt 3:1-2.

17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Matt 4:17

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near. Matt 10:5-7

32 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Luke 21:32.

9:1 And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." Mark 9:1

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Acts 1:4-5

In speaking of the kingdom, Jesus made clear that it would come in Jerusalem with power in Acts 1:3-5:

He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

The power and the kingdom came to this earth on the Day of Pentecost. In Acts 1:7-8, the power would come with the Holy Spirit:

7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and

you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

On Pentecost, Luke recorded that the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them in Acts 2:2-4:

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Paul described in Eph 1:19-23 how at his resurrection, Christ rose to sit at the right hand of God:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

Christ clearly spoke that his kingdom would not be a physical earthly kingdom. In Luke 17:20-21, the Lord taught:

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

In John 18:36, the Lord taught, “Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

The Teachings of the Apostles and Prophets Regarding the Kingdom of God and Christ

Prior to the coming of the Kingdom of Christ with power on the day of Pentecost, all statements point clearly to that day when the kingdom of God came with power. The kingdom is in the immediate future for Mary, John the Baptist, and Jesus. After that notable day of Pentecost, the Apostles and prophets speak of it as already being in existence. Paul wrote in Col 1:12-13:

Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

In 1 Thess 2:11-12, Paul made it clear that we are called into his kingdom and glory now:

11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Our suffering now is not for some future kingdom but for the kingdom now in existence, according to 2 Thess 1:5, “All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.”

Heb 1:8-9 teaches us that God has anointed His son, and the throne of the son will last forever and ever:

8 But about the Son he says,

"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever,
and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom .

9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions
by anointing you with the oil of joy."

According to Heb 12:28-29, we are now receiving that kingdom:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

John concurs with this view of the kingdom in Rev 1:5-6:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

We are clearly the kingdom of Christ right now. John spoke intimately about his and our relationship in the kingdom in Rev 1:9, "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus." The elders and living creatures in Revelation recognized that the kingdom is now, and we are in it upon the earth and in heaven forever and ever. They sang a new song in Rev 5:10: "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Loud voices in heaven also said in Rev 11:15: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

Conclusion

Finally, Rev 17:14, describes the war as spiritual war to include those of us in the kingdom who are faithful followers: "14 They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." Paul makes sure that we know that this is a spiritual war in Eph 6:11-12:

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Dan 2:39-43: What are the four elements of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? For what four earthly kingdoms do they stand? When will God's kingdom be destroyed?
2. Zech. 6:12-13: Who will build the temple of the Lord? From where will this one rule?
3. Heb 4:15: Who is our high priest?
4. Luke 1:30-33: On whose throne did the angel promise Mary that her son would sit? How long would he reign? When would his kingdom end?
5. Acts 2:30-33: Who did God tell David would sit on his throne? Where is Jesus now?
6. Matt 3:1-2: Where did John say the kingdom was?
7. Matt 4:17: Where did Jesus say the kingdom was?

8. Matt 10:5-7: What were the twelve to preach about the kingdom?
9. Luke 21:32: When did Luke say these things would happen?
10. Mark 9:1: When did Jesus say that the kingdom of God would come with power?
11. Acts 1:4-5: When did Jesus tell the apostles that they would receive the Holy Spirit?
12. Acts 1:3-5: What did Jesus speak about for forty days?
13. Acts 1:7-8: When was the power of the spirit to come?
14. Acts 2:2-4: When did the power come? How was it manifest?
15. Eph 1:19-23: Where is Jesus now? What is he over? In what ages does he reign? Over what is he head?
16. Luke 17:20-21: Where is the Lord's kingdom?
17. John 18:36: What is the nature of the Lord's kingdom?
18. Col 1:12-13: What are we qualified to inherit? To what has God brought us?
19. 1 Thess 2:11-12: Into what are we called?
20. 2 Thess 1:5: Of what are we counted worthy?
21. Heb 1:8-9: How long will Jesus remain on his throne?
22. Heb 12:28-29: What are Christians now receiving?
23. Rev 1:5-6: What has Christ made us?
24. Rev 1:9: In what is John our companion?
25. Rev 5:10: What did Jesus make us to be?
26. Rev 11:15: Over what does Jesus reign? For how long will he reign?
27. Rev 17:14: What is Jesus called? Who will be with him?
28. Eph 6:11-12: In what kind of war are we? Who is the enemy? What must we put on in order to stand?