



Foundations of

FAITH

The Kingdom of God

Lesson 23

The Jewish nation during the first century A.D. was filled with one great hope. It was looking for a Messiah who would re-establish the kingdom of Israel and reign in Jerusalem upon David's throne. Even the apostles of Christ were apparently still possessed of this hope at the time of his ascension for they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

Christ did come to earth that he might establish a kingdom, but it was not the kind of monarchy for which the children of Israel were looking. One of the chief reasons that Jesus was never fully accepted by his own people was that they did not comprehend his mission.

THE TERMS USED. In many places in the New Testament a divine institution composed of the people of God is mentioned. This body is designated in several different ways. It is called "the church", "the way", "the body", "the kingdom of heaven", the kingdom of God", "the kingdom of his dear Son", "the kingdom of Christ and of God", and "the kingdom". While these terms are not identical, they refer to the same body. For example, Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10 are parallel passages. In Matthew the kingdom is spoken of as the kingdom of heaven, while Mark's and Luke's accounts call it the kingdom of God.

Similarly, the church is identified as the kingdom. After Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus pronounced a blessing upon him. He concluded it saying, "And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my **church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against

it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the **kingdom of heaven.**" (Matt. 16:18, 19) Notice how Jesus here used the terms "church" and "kingdom of heaven" interchangeably, showing that they are the same institution. In Colossians 1:13 Paul speaks of "**the kingdom of his dear Son**", and then in verse 18 without a break in thought describes the same entity as "the body, the **church.**" Likewise in Hebrews 12:23 and 28 we read of "the general assembly and **church** of the firstborn" and "a **kingdom** which cannot be moved." The significance of these identifications is that we may conclude that the characteristics of both the church and kingdom are the same.

THE KINGDOM IN PROPHECY. In a previous lesson Daniel's prophecy relating to the great image was studied. King Nebuchadnezzar had seen in a dream a little stone cut out without hands which smote the great image (representing four universal empires) and broke it in pieces. In his interpretation Daniel said of the stone, "And 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, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Daniel 2:44) We also learn from this verse that the kingdom was to be set up during the last of the four universal empires, the Roman, and that its duration was to be perpetual.

Furthermore, he states that the little stone would become a great mountain. In view of this, a prophecy of Isaiah takes on special significance. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain

of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isaiah 2:2, 3:3). Thus, the kingdom would be established in Zion (or Jerusalem), and it would extend to all nations. The fulfilment is described in Hebrews 12:18, 22, 23, 28. "For ye are not come unto the **mount** that might be touched, and that burneth with fire, not unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest ... But ye are come unto mount Sion (Zion), and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and **church** of the firstborn ... Wherefore we receiving **a kingdom which cannot be moved**, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." This passage refers to the kingdom of the prophecies. The mountain is Zion from which Isaiah said the kingdom would emanate. It is called an immovable kingdom corresponding to that mentioned by Daniel which would never be destroyed. We conclude that at the time of the writing of Hebrews this kingdom had been established, and that its beginning must be sought prior to that time.

THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED. John the Baptist heralded the coming kingdom. "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:2) The expression "at hand" signifies that which is imminent. Soon afterwards Jesus also declared, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17) He told his disciples as he sent them forth, "And as ye go, preach, saying The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 10:7) Later he added, "truly I say unto you, that there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matt. 16:28) Mark records Jesus as saying, "Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." (Mark 9:1) Then, the kingdom as to be established with power during the lifetime of some then present.

After his resurrection the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his

own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8) He also admonished them to "tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 4:49)

The fulfilment of these promises and prophecies took place on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection. Read Acts 2:1-8. At that time the apostles were baptised by the Holy Spirit according to the Lord's promise that the Holy Spirit would come upon them with power. It was during the lifetime of some to whom Jesus had foretold the coming kingdom, even as he had predicted. And the locality of these occurrences was Jerusalem (or Zion) as prophesied by Isaiah. Three thousand were baptised as a result of the preaching of the apostles and the church is thereafter spoken of as being in existence. We conclude that the kingdom of God, the church, was established on this Pentecost at the time that the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Any theory which teaches that the kingdom was established before Pentecost is necessarily false. Likewise, the premillennial teaching that the kingdom is yet to be established is equally false since it denies the Old Testament prophets, the promises of Jesus, and the plain statements of the apostles to the fact that the kingdom is now in existence.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM. The spiritual nature of the kingdom of God was never fully comprehended by the Jews. When Pilate asked Jesus if he were king of the Jews, Jesus stated "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: but now is my kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36) When the Pharisees demanded of him when the kingdom of God would come, he replied, "The kingdom of God comes not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

In these passages Jesus taught that the kingdom would not come with outward show as would any temporal kingdom. The kingdom cannot be seen with the naked eye, because, being a spiritual kingdom, it exists in the hearts of men. As people are converted to Christ and he comes to dwell in them, the kingdom spreads. Of course, the people in whom Christ dwells

are visible and in that sense the kingdom is also visible, but its domain cannot be measured in geographical terms as can other kingdoms.

The premillennial theory asserts that Jesus is yet to establish a temporal kingdom. The proponents of this idea make the same mistake that the Jews did in the time of Christ when they expected the Messiah to reign on David’s literal throne in Jerusalem. They fail to comprehend that the spiritual nature of the divine kingdom makes impossible a temporal kingdom since the “kingdom is not of this world.”

Paul says of Christ, “Now unto the king, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.” (I Tim. 1:17) If the king is eternal, immortal and invisible, it follows that his kingdom must partake of the same characteristics. It must therefore be eternal – without end; immortal – it will never die; and invisible – it is spiritual rather than temporal and the citizenship of the subjects of the king is heavenly, “For our citizenship is in heaven.” Phil. 1:20 – A.S.V.)

EXTENT AND GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM. The prophet Zechariah declared that the kingdom should extend “from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.” (Zech. 9:10) Isaiah foretold that all nations would flow into it. (Isaiah 2:2) The parables of Jesus relating to the kingdom

demonstrated that it was to have a small beginning, but experience a tremendous growth. Therefore as prophesied, the gospel of the kingdom was preached to everyone who would believe – the Jew and the Gentile. (Romans 1:16) So rapid was the kingdom’s spread in the first century that the apostle Paul was able to declare within a few decades that the gospel had been preached in all creation under heaven. (Col. 1:23) Truly, as prophesied by Daniel, the little stone cut out without hands was now a great mountain that filled the whole earth.

THE FUTURE OF THE KINGDOM. The kingdom of God will not terminate with the second coming of Christ. It is called “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (II Peter 1:11) However, when Christ returns he will deliver up the kingdom to God, and he himself shall then be subject to the Father. (I Cor. 15:24-28)

ENTRANCE TO THE KINGDOM. As shown in the lesson on “The New Birth,” the only entrance to the kingdom of God is by being born of water and the Spirit. (John 3:5) Since citizenship in the kingdom of God is necessary to eternal life, the new birth is essential to a home in heaven. And since the birth of water is accomplished in baptism, one cannot inherit eternal life and be saved unless he is baptised into Christ.

TEST ON LESSON 23

Write true or false after the following statements:

1. The Jews expected the Messiah to establish a spiritual kingdom.
2. Christ’s kingdom is spiritual rather than temporal.
3. The church and the kingdom are different bodies.
4. Isaiah foretold that the kingdom would be established in Zion.
5. Statements by John and Jesus that the kingdom was at hand meant that it would soon be established.
6. The kingdom was established at the Passover.
7. Jesus will someday establish a temporal kingdom on earth.
8. The kingdom is eternal.

- 9. Christ will never deliver the kingdom to God, the Father.
- 10. Entrance to the kingdom is gained by being born of water and the Spirit.

In what exact verse of scripture are we told that:

- 1. The kingdom of God would break in pieces other kingdoms?
- 2. The word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem?
- 3. John the Baptist said the kingdom was at hand?
- 4. Some would not taste of death until they had seen the kingdom of God come with power?
- 5. The disciples were to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high?
- 6. The disciples asked Jesus if he would then restore the kingdom to Israel?
- 7. Jesus replied that they would receive power after the Holy Ghost had come upon them and they would be his witnesses?
- 8. A sound as of a rushing mighty wind filled the house where the apostles were?
- 9. We have received a kingdom which cannot be moved?

The following statements each tell us something about the nature of the kingdom. Match them with the scripture references below which teach the same thing by writing the scripture locations after the corresponding statements:

- 1. The kingdom is of great value. (a) Matthew 25:1-13
- 2. The kingdom is within the individual. (b) Luke 9:62
- 3. The kingdom is not for those who look back. (c) Matthew 13:33
- 4. The kingdom is not temporal. (d) Matthew 13:44
- 5. The kingdom has great influence. (e) Luke 17:21
- 6. The kingdom is for those who are prepared. (f) John 18:36

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Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – F, T, F, T, T, F, F, T, F, T.

Section 2 –

1. Daniel 2:44
2. Isaiah 2:3
3. Matt. 3:2
4. Mark 9:1
5. Luke 24:49
6. Acts 1:6
7. Acts 1:8
8. Acts 2:2
9. Heb. 12:28

Section 3 –

1. (d)
2. (e)
3. (b)
4. (f)
5. (c)
6. (a)

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