

## PETER AND HIS KEYS

Last week our congregation at Haddington had a passing visit from some itinerant evangelists of the Christadelphians, engaged on a preaching tour of Scotland. Some attended our gospel-meeting, and later came to our mid-week Bible Study where we conversed about some of our differences. Time was limited and our discussions centred mainly upon “The Kingdom of God — now, or yet future”? Before offering a few thoughts on the subject, perhaps it might be useful, for the benefit of any who might know nothing about Christadelphians, to say a few words on their history. I suppose I could do no better than quote **Encyclopedia Britannica**, viz. “Christadelphians, sometimes also called ‘Thomasites’; a community founded in 1848 by John Thomas (1805 - 1871) who, after studying medicine in London, migrated to Brooklyn, N.Y., U.S.A. There he first joined the “Campbellites”, but afterwards struck out independently, preaching largely upon the application of the Hebrew prophecy and the Book of Revelation, to current and future events. Both in America and Great Britain he gathered a number of adherents, and formed a community which was extended to several English-speaking countries. They believe that they alone hold the true interpretation of the Scripture. Their theology is strongly millenarian, centring on the hope of a world-wide theocracy with its seat in Jerusalem. No statistics of the community are published.”

The above quote from Enc. Brit. sums it up well, but, of course, tells only a fraction of the story. Dr. Thomas set sail for the U.S.A. in 1832 and met Alexander Campbell there in 1833. After a long discussion with the pioneer evangelist Walter Scott, Dr. Thomas was baptised (in the Miama Canal at 10.00 p.m. in the moonlight) and so became a member of the churches of Christ. He started a religious magazine in Virginia called **The Apostolic Adviser** and began to publicise his own dogmatic opinions on prophecy, etc., and was taken to task by Campbell in **The Millennial Harbinger**: who wrote “And now, I fear, we are about to find, or rather have found, in the person of Dr. Thomas, another of those infallible dogmatists so supremely devoted to his own opinions, and his own glory in defending them — so confident in asserting them — so diligent in propagating them . . . he has become a factionalist of the most indomitable spirit.” With regard to Dr. Thomas’s ‘distinctive’ approach to properly understanding the scriptures, Campbell said, “Fool that I was, to think that words in the Bible were to be understood by the same rules of interpretation applied to other books . . . Such a system of interpretation (as that of Dr. Thomas) drives both myself, all commentators, dictionaries and the twelve apostles out of the field. Rules of logic, laws of language, criticism to such a reasoner, are as straws to

a Leviathan". Followers of the Doctor were called 'Thomasites' until late in his life (about 1864) when he coined the name "Christadelphian" to save his young men from being drafted into military service in the American Civil War (apparently all sects had to have a 'proper' name and Dr. Thomas chose this one). Dr. Thomas publicly repudiated the baptism he had received at the hands of Walter Scott, something he later denied when questioned by David King and the London church. David King also shows how the Doctor plagiarised one of his many books (*Anatolia*) from the writings of Granville Penn, While claiming in the Introduction that it was "original throughout", thus placing another question-mark upon his personal integrity. (See "History & Mystery of Christadelphianism" by David King).

### THE KINGDOM — NOW, OR YET FUTURE ?

As stated above the Christadelphian theology 'is strongly millenarian' and is based upon their prediction of a "Great Millennial Reign", when, they allege, Christ will reign for 1,000 years in Jerusalem. Consequently they do not believe that the Kingdom of God came into being in N.T. times, nor do they have any regard for the church. Because they maintain that the Kingdom of God **did not exist** in N.T. times, Christadelphians understandably, have difficulty in dealing with the many passages of scripture which state, quite categorically, that the Kingdom certainly did exist in N.T. times. (To save space I will abbreviate the Kingdom to "K.ofG., or K.ofH.)

As to when the K.ofG. would come, Daniel (2:44) prophesied that it would come "in the days of these Kings" (feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image). What Kings? We could argue about it, but Jesus and John the Baptist ended all speculation when they said "The time is fulfilled, the K.ofH. is at hand." (Mark 1:5). Thus it came during the reign of the Roman kings and was not something reserved for the end of the world. Indeed, Jesus said on one occasion, that some of those listening to Him would not die "before they had seen the kingdom come with power." (Mark 9:1). Again, Jesus angered the chief priests by informing them "That the publicans and harlots go into the K.ofG. before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not, but the publicans and harlots believed him. . ." If the K.ofH. did not exist in N.T. times one wonders how the publicans and harlots could enter it. Again, Jesus said (Matt. 11:12) "And from the days of John The Baptist until now the K.ofG. suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." It certainly seemed to exist. Again, Jesus said (Matt. 23:13) "But woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye shut up the K.ofH. against men, for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." Yes, the kingdom existed and could be entered. The apostle Paul urged the Christians at Colosse to give thanks to God for having "delivered them from the power of darkness" and for "having translated them INTO the kingdom of God's dear Son." (Col. 1:13).

Examples similar to the above could be greatly multiplied (e.g. Peter was given the keys of the kingdom and told to use them, etc.) but, quite apart from these the parables also teach that the K.ofG. existed in N.T. times. Jesus said, "The K.ofH. is like a certain king which would take account of his servants" (Matt. 18:23); or "was as a travelling into a far country" (Matt. 25:14); or, "was like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son" (Matt. 22:2); or, "is like unto a man who is a householder" (Matt. 20:1); or, "is like unto leaven which a woman took" (Matt. 13:33); or, "is like unto a grain of mustard seed" (Matt. 3:31); or, "is likened unto ten virgins" (Matt. 25:1); or, "is like unto a treasure hid in a field" (Matt. 13:34); or, "is like a net cast into the sea" (Matt. 13:47); or, "is like a merchant seeking goodly pearls" (Matt. 13:45). Clearly these 'kingdom' parables were meaningless if there was to be no kingdom until the end of the world.

## SPIRITUAL OR MATERIAL ?

In reply, Christadelphians quote 1 Cor. 15:50 (where Paul says “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the K.ofG.”) and argue as we are all “flesh and blood” we cannot be in the K.ofG. They also refer to passages like Matt. 25:34 where Jesus, at the Great Assize, will say “Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you . . .” and argue that if we are yet to “inherit” the kingdom, it follows that we cannot be in it now. This point of view deserves some comment. Obviously there are progressive ‘phrases’ of God’s kingdom and ‘K.ofG.’ is a term which requires thoughtful application. Albert Barnes says, “The phrases ‘K. of G. or K. of H.’ have been supposed to have considerable variety of meaning. Some have thought that they refer to the state of things in heaven; others, to the personal reign of Christ on earth; others that they mean the Church; or the reign of Christ in the hearts of the people. There can be no doubt that there is reference in the words to the condition of things in heaven after this life. But the church of God is a preparatory state to that beyond the grave; a state in which Christ pre-eminently rules and reigns; and there is no doubt that it sometimes refers to the state of things in the church; and it means, therefore, that state of things which the Messiah was to have set-up — **“His spiritual reign begun in the church on earth, and completed in heaven .”** Barnes also describes how the Jews supposed that when the Great Deliverer would come He would rescue them, by destroying their enemies, and restoring them to their former national dignity and ascendancy. However, in the event, He came to deliver them not from earthly foes, but from sin; and He came not to call them to arms and battle, but to repentance, showing the **spiritual nature** of the kingdom.

Brother Crosthwaite maintained that the only safe method of Bible Study was to approach any particular subject with an open (but not a vacant) mind, and, with the aid of a Concordance, examine every relevant passage of scripture. From this, one would form an opinion and would discard all former spurious opinions. He tells of a Correspondence Course conducted by Bro. Lancelot Oliver, some 60 years previously, where the subject was the K.ofG. and where every student had to examine every passage which related to the kingdom (about 150 refs.). Then the students were asked to classify those passages under four main headings: viz. The Kingdom Universal: The Kingdom National: The Kingdom Spiritual: and The Kingdom Eternal. This was surely good advice for unless we appreciate that there are various **phases** of God’s kingdom we shall often be confused. The prophet Micah (4:8) speaks of the “First Dominion” of the kingdom and this presumably pre-supposes other dominions (a second or third). **KINGDOM UNIVERSAL:** Man is the ‘offspring’ of God and in a real sense part of God’s universal kingdom; where God has complete sovereignty. **“His kingdom ruleth overall”** and **“God is king over all the earth”** (Ps. 103:19 & 47:7). **“He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?”** (Dan. 4:35).

**KINGDOM NATIONAL :** In a very particular sense the Israelites, after their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, became God’s unique ‘national’ kingdom. God said to them, **“Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me, above all people, for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a KINGDOM of priests, and a holy nation.”** Sacred history shows that the Jews did not keep their end of the bargain, but became steeped in idolatry. They eventually demanded an earthly king and in effect rejected God’s rule. Jesus rapidly brought us up to date (in the parable of the wicked husbandmen) when He said to the Jews, **“Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”** (Matt.21:33-46). Paul (in Rom. 11) tells us that it was **“because of unbelief”** that the original branches (the Jews) were broken off and new branches (The Gentiles) were grafted in.

**KINGDOM SPIRITUAL** : Contrary to Jewish expectations (and some modern sects), Jesus and His apostles taught that the kingdom would be spiritual, not literal. The Jewish 'National' kingdom had **lands with literal boundaries** prescribed by God Himself, but Christ's kingdom, though world-wide in scope, has certainly **no geographical location**, and is not embodied in the lands promised (and given) to Abraham and his seed. Jesus said, **"My kingdom is not of this world"** else would My servants fight. The weapons of His warfare are not carnal but spiritual, because His kingdom is not carnal but spiritual. Jesus also said, **"The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo here! or Lo there! for, behold the kingdom of God is within you"** (Luke 17:20). Peter, using the keys to open the kingdom, called upon men to **"Repent and be baptised for the remission of sins"** and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, thus illustrating again the spiritual nature of the kingdom. This is precisely in keeping with the Lord's words to Nicodemus, **"Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."** Undoubtedly the 3,000 men who responded to Peter's call and were baptised, were, that day, born of water and the Spirit and entered the kingdom.

### **KINGDOM ETERNAL**

And so we come to the final, or **eternal**, aspect of the K.ofG. when all operations will be transferred from an earthly to a heavenly sphere. Then Paul says, **"as we have borne the image of the earthy, so shall we also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the K.ofG."** (1 Cor. 15:49). **"And so we shall all be changed,"** the living and the dead, so that we might be fitted for the new environment in heaven. Peter, writing to those in Christ's earthly but spiritual kingdom, hoped that they might qualify for entry into God's eternal kingdom **"by making their calling and election sure."** **"For,"** says Peter, **"if you do these things"** (good works) **"So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the EVER-LASTING KINGDOM of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."** (2 Peter 1:11).

Those in the O.T. 'National' kingdom, and those in Christ's **Spiritual** kingdom, will, together with all those in God's **Universal Kingdom**, stand at the bar of God's Judgement and be adjudged fit or unfit for the **Eternal Kingdom** in heaven. This is confirmed in the parable of the tares when Jesus said, **"Then shall the Son of Man send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His KINGDOM all things that offend and them which do Iniquity . . ."** Having cleansed and purified His kingdom in this way, Jesus will then hand it over to God. Paul, referring to the **last day**, (when the resurrection and the Judgement takes place) says, **"Then cometh the end, when He (Christ) shall have delivered up the KINGDOM to God, even the Father . . ."** (1 Cor. 15:24). (Paul seemed to know nothing of a 1,000 years reign). And so the Kingdom of Christ (considered by our Christadelphian friends not to exist) was opened up by the keys of Peter and has continued (and will continue) to open its doors to all desirous of entry. Thus it will continue until the end of the world, when it will be handed over to God and establish itself in its new quarters: in the 'place prepared' by Jesus, in heaven. By God's grace and mercy may we all be worthy of entry.

EDITOR.