

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 1 0 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

THE KINGDOM – PRESENT OR FUTURE?

It comes as a shock to many people to find that some things in the Bible are exceedingly simple. Some do not want this to be so. To them the divine Word must never be plain; it must always be mysterious. Therefore, when it is said that "kingdom" means "government," the statement is rejected with the curt dismissal, "Too simple!" They are somewhat like Naaman, whom Elisha told to go and wash in Jordan seven times if he desired to be cleansed from his leprosy. The great commander in chief thought this was far too simple a solution of his complex problem. It was good that his servants straightened him out on this or he would have been a leper till the day of his death.

The word *government* says everything that is contained in the Greek word *basileia*. There is no occurrence of this word in the New Testament where the word government will not fit; even though there are places where the synonymous terms *rule*, *sovereignty*, *jurisdiction* and *reign* might be more apropos due to the context.

In theological writings two main interpretations of the kingdom of God will be found, the eschatological and the non-eschatological. These interpretations are in respect to the question: Is the kingdom of God present or future? Is it the present reign of God in the hearts of submissive men, or is it the future reign of Jesus Christ over the earth? The eschatological position is that it is future. The non-eschatological position is that it is a present spiritual reality.

I take my position with that great number of careful and believing students of the Word who have come to the fixed conclusion that the kingdom of God

is a future condition of things, a future reality of divine government that will exist upon the earth after a miraculous intervention by God. Many have written eloquently to this end, and what they have said is worthy of careful consideration. Samuel J. Andrews has said:

All prophecy, as we have abundantly seen, pointed forward to the universal kingdom of Jehovah, administered by the promised Son of David. For this the world is to wait, in it all nature will be blessed: it is the consummation of prophetic hope. All His prior actings in redemption are to prepare the way for this, its last stage. . . . Thus there is during the Kingdom period a well-ordered system of government, embracing the whole earth, administered by Christ through those whom He appoints; a system adapted to meet the needs of all its inhabitants in all their varied conditions and degrees of intellectual and spiritual development. Now is first seen the full power of the Divine institutions of the family and state, when filled by His Spirit, to produce the purest and noblest fruits in individual life. Now is, also, seen the full development of national life, the solution of all social and political questions, and the true unity of nations. All that men have ever imagined of human progress in science and art will fall far short of those who will study God's works, not from personal ambition or vanity, but out of love for Him, delighting in every new discovery of His wisdom and goodness, and using all knowledge for the blessing of their fellow-men. (*God's Revelations of Himself to Men*, pages 318, 323, 324).

This is a profound statement in respect to the eschatological position, the belief that the kingdom of God is a future divine condition of things upon this earth. I utter a fervent "Amen" to every word quoted above, and declare that when this is a reality I want to be a part of it; and I would be perpetually happy if it should be the will of God and my portion to be among those "who will study God's works, not from personal ambition or vanity, but out of love for Him." Along these same lines Alva J. McClain has said in his book *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Zondervan, 1959):

There is a current and popular idea that the coming of the kingdom of God to earth is a process, long and gradual; at times so imperceptible that skeptics may be able to dispute seriously whether there be such a thing as the reign of God. Such a notion has no foundation in the writings of the Old Testament prophets (page 174). In the day of the coming Kingdom, it will not be necessary to write endless volumes on Christian "evidences" and "apologetics." Debates on the existence of God will become absurd and obsolete, suited only to be classed with arguments over the existence of sunlight.

Eschatological systems which define the Kingdom of God wholly in terms of the invisible will need to be revised. For the supernatural evidences of the existence of God, and of His Christ, and of His Kingdom, will be open to all men (page 176). These great moral principles of the mediatorial government will be enforced by *sanctions of supernatural power*. The answer of God to all people and kings who venture to set themselves against the beneficent rule of the coming Kingdom is a solemn commission to His anointed King: "**Thou art my son Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen (nations) for thine inheritance. . . . Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potters vessel**" (Ps. 2:7-9). No longer will the wicked oppressor of the poor be able to utter his cynical judgment: "**God hath forgotten; He hideth His face; He will never see it**" (Psa. 10:9-11). No longer will the righteous be troubled about the ways of God in a world where things seem to be upside down (Ps. 73 :2-16). The question as to whether or not we live in a "moral universe" will no longer be a subject for philosophic debate. For in the coming Kingdom the judgments of God will be immediate and tangible to all men (Zech. 14:17-19; Isa. 66:24), The long period of God's judicial silence, which men have perversely construed as an evidence of moral indifference instead of long-suffering mercy on the part of God, will come to an end (Psa. 50:21). And with the judgments of a Holy God once more manifest in the earth, "**the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness**" (Isa. 26:9), (Pages 208, 209).

A paragraph from the writings of George E. Ladd is also pertinent here:

The kingdom of God is therefore primarily a soteriological concept, It is God acting in power and exercising His sovereignty for the defeat of Satan and the restoration of human society to its rightful place of willing subservience to the will of God, It is not the sovereignty of God as such; God is always and everywhere the sovereign God, It is the sovereignty of God in action to frustrate every enemy which would oppose God's will (I Cor. 15:25), It is not the reign of God as such; for God is ultimately reigning as the eternal King, It is the action of the sovereign God of heaven by which His reign is restored in power to those areas of His creation which He has permitted to move outside the actual acknowledgment of His rule, The kingdom of God then is God's reign, the activity of God's sovereign and kingly authority. German has a better word for it than English: *Gottesherrschaft*. The central meaning *is* not realm, but authority, (*Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God*, page 83).

Quotations such as these could be multiplied, since many writers have declared themselves along these same lines. Great indeed is the number of Bible students who see the kingdom of God as being the future reign of God over this earth and its inhabitants. They hold that the manifest kingdom of God upon the earth will be the result of a "cataclysmic irruption of God into history," as Ladd so aptly states it. They reject the idea that the kingdom of God will come through the efforts of men, and hold that it will be inaugurated by a supernatural act or acts of God. Among that "mighty army" past and present who have held and taught the "future kingdom" view, can be listed such names as Darby, Kelly, Andrews, Anderson, Seiss, Bullinger, Gray, Gabelein, Torrey, Pierson, Tregelles, Scofield, Haldeman, Chafer, Riley, Ironside, McClain, Walvoord, Culbertson, Pentecost, and many more. I follow in their train.

However, in the writings of all those mentioned above there are two errors constantly found which I am convinced vitiate and stultify the Bible revelation of the kingdom of God. Present space limits will permit me to deal with only one of these.

This one, seen especially in the writings of George E. Ladd, is that the kingdom of God is both present and future; that there is some action of God now among men that can be called the kingdom of God, and a future glorious reign of Christ over the earth that is also called the kingdom of God. As Ladd puts the question: "Can it involve both a millennial reign of Christ on earth in the future and a present spiritual reign of Christ in the hearts of His people?" His answer is that it involves both.

It is apparent that this position would require the sorting out of every statement concerning the kingdom of God in the New Testament into two groups - those that apply to the kingdom which is now and those that apply to the kingdom which is future. If this is attempted, it will be found that there are only about four out of seventy-four which might be applied to the "kingdom now" idea; but when these are properly interpreted, they will be seen to belong to the future kingdom.

I do not believe that anyone can point to anything on this earth today and say, "That is God's government; that is the kingdom of God." That which is called "the present spiritual reign of Christ in the hearts of His people," whatever this may be, is not what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of the kingdom of God.

It is certainly true that in the 33 years of the Acts period there were definite events that one could point to and, calling a part by the name of the whole, say, "That is a manifestation of divine sovereignty; there is a sample of God's government. in action." There are innumerable things today of which we can say, "This is God's providence," and many more of which we can say, "This is God's grace;" but there is nothing we can point to and say, "That is God's government."

END ISSUE NO. SB031