

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART XVIII

by Andy Woods

Because today's church largely believes in the kingdom's presence, we began a study chronicling what the Bible teaches about the kingdom. The biblical teaching on the kingdom has been surveyed from Genesis to Revelation. This earthly kingdom is anticipated in the office of Theocratic Administrator that was lost in Eden, in the biblical covenants, in the predictions of the Old Testament prophets, and in the earthly theocracy governing Israel from the time of Moses to Zedekiah. This theocratic arrangement terminated with the "Times of the Gentiles" when the nation had no king reigning on David's Throne as Judah was trampled by various Gentile powers. Against that backdrop entered Jesus Christ, the rightful Heir to David's Throne. Had first-century Israel enthroned Christ, the earthly kingdom would have manifested. Despite this unprecedented opportunity, Israel rejected the kingdom offer leading to its postponement.

Consequently, Christ explained the spiritual conditions that would prevail during the kingdom's absence. This interim program includes His revelation of the kingdom mysteries and the church (Matt. 13; 16:18). Because neither the kingdom mysteries nor the church represent the fulfillment of God's Old Testament kingdom promises, the kingdom will remain in a state of abeyance as long as God's present work in the world continues through His interim program. However, one day the church's mission on the earth will be completed resulting in the church's removal from the earth through the rapture. Then God, who is not forgetful of His prior unconditional covenants with Israel, will re-extend the offer of the kingdom to national Israel in the midst of the coming Great Tribulation. Unlike at the First Advent, this time the offer will be accepted leading to Christ's return and subsequent earthly kingdom. Revelation therefore explains how the world will eventually transition from the rule that Satan has had over the world

ever since the Fall in Eden (Luke 4:5-8) to the future time in history when God and His people "will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:10b; 11:15b).

In addition, we explained that the expression "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" merely communicates that the Old Testament expectation of an earthly kingdom had drawn near in the person of Christ. Had the nation enthroned Christ (Deut. 17:15), what the Old Testament predicted concerning an earthly kingdom would have become a reality not only for Israel but also for the entire world. As long as Christ was present amongst first-century Israel offering them the kingdom, it was in an imminent state of nearness. This reality is an entirely different matter from saying that the kingdom was present or had arrived.

THE "LORD'S PRAYER" AND THE KINGDOM

Some believe Christ inaugurated the kingdom in spiritual form during His First Advent.¹ One way of showing the implausibility of such a proposition is by exploring the true meaning of the so-called "Lord's Prayer" found in Matthew 6:9-13. These verses say:

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil (NASB).

In actuality, this prayer is all about the kingdom.² Toussaint explains, "The sample prayer, it can be concluded, is given in the context of the coming kingdom. The first three requests are petitions for the coming of the kingdom. The last three are for the needs of the disciples in the interim preceding the establishment of the kingdom."³ If Matthew 6:9-13 is in actuality a model prayer for the disciples consisting of three requests for the kingdom to come

¹ Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler: TX: ICE, 1997), 223-26.

² Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2005), 107-112.

³ *Ibid.*, 112.

and three additional requests for their temporal needs to be met prior to the kingdom's establishment, then it becomes obvious that the Lord did not establish the kingdom at His First Advent. Otherwise, the "Disciples' Prayer" becomes nonsensical. After all, why pray for the coming of the kingdom and make additional requests until its establishment if the kingdom were already a present reality?

THREE REQUESTS RELATED TO TEMPORAL NEEDS

Previously, we observed that the first three clauses (Matt. 6:9-10) found in the "Disciples Prayer" (the requests for God's name to be revered, the kingdom to come, and the sovereign will of God to be done on the earth) are in reality requests for the yet future kingdom. Similarly, Matthew 6:11-13 can best be understood as three requests that petition the Father to meet the temporal needs of Christ's disciples in the era leading up to the kingdom's establishment while the kingdom remains in a state of postponement. Walvoord notes, "In verse 11, the petitions are changed to the first person relating to human need."⁴ *First*, Matthew 6:11 says, "Give us this day our daily bread." Here, "bread" is most likely used as a figure of speech known as a *synecdoche* (where a part is used to represent the whole) to represent general nourishment. According to Glasscock, "'Bread' was most likely used figuratively for food in general (Gen. 3:19)."⁵ The kingdom will be a time of great agricultural prosperity resulting in no more starvation or food shortage. Amos 9:13 says, "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'When the plowman will overtake the reaper And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; When the mountains will drip sweet wine...'" Isaiah 65:21-22a similarly notes, "They will build houses and inhabit *them*; They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build and another inhabit, They will not plant and another eat." Zechariah 8:12 similarly predicts, "For *there will be* peace for the

⁴ John Walvoord, *Matthew* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 53.

⁵ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 148.

seed: the vine will yield its fruit, the land will yield its produce and the heavens will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these *things*."

Until this time of agricultural prosperity in the kingdom age comes, food shortages will continue to be a reality for humanity. Thus, it is appropriate for Christ to instruct His disciples to pray for their daily provision until this specific request becomes unnecessary after the kingdom comes. During the wilderness wanderings, God miraculously and physically provided for the nation of Israel through the daily provision of *manna*. This provision continued until the nation entered Canaan – the land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 16:14-36; Josh. 5:11-12). At that point, daily provision of *manna* was no longer required since the prosperity of the land economically sustained the nation. Similarly, God must supply the daily needs of His disciples until every physical need is abundantly met once the agricultural prosperity of the kingdom age becomes an earthly reality. Hence, Christ instructs His disciples to pray for their daily sustenance during the kingdom's absence.

Second, Matthew 6:12 says, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Here, Christ instructs His disciples to seek spiritual provision when they sin and fall out of fellowship with the Father. Toussaint explains, "Judicial forgiveness is not in view (Acts 10:43) but fellowship (1 John 1:5-9). It is impossible for one to be in fellowship with God as long as he harbors ill will in his heart."⁶ Walvoord also explains, "The Christian already forgiven judicially should not expect restoration in the family unless he, himself, is forgiving."⁷ Glasscock similarly notes:

It is not likely here that the issue of forgiveness is referring to initial redemptive forgiveness (for salvation) but the forgiveness for offense

⁶ Toussaint, 111.

⁷ Walvoord, 53.

against the Father in the perpetual daily life situation (for fellowship). There is no salvific passage that requires the one being saved to perform any act, such as forgiving others, in order to gain forgiveness. The overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that salvation from eternal torment is a free gift not granted on the basis of any act (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Rom. 4:5; etc.).⁸

When Christ comes to establish His kingdom, His disciples will be resurrected and thus in bodies with no capacity for sin (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4-5). However, in the meantime, while still in mortal bodies, followers of Christ still retain a propensity for sin and thus can still fall out of fellowship with the Father. Consequently, they need spiritual provision to maintain or to restore fellowship with God. Therefore, Christ explains this interim spiritual provision in Matthew 6:12.

Third, Matthew 6:13 says, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Glasscock notes, "...and the object from which we are to seek deliverance is evil. More literally it should be understood as 'the Evil One.'...The petition of the model prayer, then, is for God to allow us to undergo the testing but to be rescued from the snare of the Evil One, the Devil."⁹ The kingdom represents a time in history when Satan will be incarcerated (Rev. 20:2-3). With the kingdom absent in the present age, Satan remains the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "...prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Thus, in the present age, with the kingdom and Satan's incarceration not a present reality, the believer is in need of protection from the Adversary (John 17:15). Such protection is what the believer must pray for during this interim age, before the kingdom comes. In sum, in Matthew 6:9-11, Christ teaches His followers to ask the Father to meet their temporal needs (physical provision, spiritual restoration, and divine protection from Satan) during the kingdom's absence. Once the kingdom comes, such requests will no longer be necessary. In conclusion, when rightly understood, the

⁸ Glasscock, 148-49.

⁹ Ibid., 150.

"Disciples' Prayer" consists of three requests for the kingdom to come and three additional requests for provisions that are needed while the kingdom remains in abeyance. Thus, the whole notion that Christ already established the kingdom in spiritual form at His First Advent becomes unlikely, if not impossible.

(To Be Continued...)