

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART XXV
by Andy Woods

Today's evangelical world largely believes that the church is experiencing the Messianic kingdom. To address this type of confusion, we began a study chronicling what the Bible teaches about the kingdom. In this series, the biblical teaching on the kingdom has been surveyed from Genesis to Revelation. We have noted thus far that what the Old Testament predicts concerning an earthly kingdom was offered to Israel during Christ's First Advent. Yet, the nation rejected this kingdom offer leading to the kingdom's postponement. In the interim, the kingdom is future as God now pursues an interim program that includes the church.

In addition, we began scrutinizing a series of texts that "kingdom now" theologians routinely employ in order to argue that the kingdom is a present reality in order to show that none of these passages, when rightly understood, teach a present, spiritual form of the kingdom. We began with the use of alleged "kingdom now" texts in the earthly ministry of Christ, such as "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:5-7), "seek first His kingdom" (Matt. 6:33), "until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence" (Matt. 11:12), "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28), "the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:21), "unless one is born again he cannot...enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3-5), "some...who are standing here...will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28), "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it" (Matt. 21:43), and "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH

A final statement by Christ that is used by "kingdom now" theologians is found in Matthew 28:18-20. These famous verses, typically known as the Great Commission, say, "All

authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Those who teach that the Davidic Kingdom is a present reality often utilize these verses to substantiate their theology. These verses seem prominent in the thinking of Progressive Dispensationalists, who maintain that the Davidic Kingdom is present in spiritual form as Jesus now reigns from David's Throne from heaven over the church. While still holding to a future or "not yet" earthly reign of Christ following Christ's Second Advent, Progressive Dispensationalists still argue that the Davidic Kingdom is "already" here in spiritual form. Progressive Dispensationalists lean heavily on Christ's remark, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Of this verse, leading Progressive Dispensationalist Darrell Bock says:

The point made here is like that of Matthew 28:18, where all authority resides with Jesus, who has formed a community through which He provides spiritual blessing. This is the first stage of the kingdom program. Nonetheless, the demonstration of full authority awaits his return.¹

Elsewhere Bock similarly observes:

...the biblical terminology and conceptual field (even the name Christ) show that the authority of Jesus is received now (Matthew 28:18-20...) and involves the exercise of that authority at certain key soteriological points. Jesus' executive authority in a variety of areas as shown in this listing indicates that His activity is messianic, and thus regal, not merely high priestly...If it is messianic and Davidic, then it is regal and indicates initial manifestations of Jesus' rule.²

However, for at least *four* reasons, there does not seem to be enough in this passage to construct a theology entailing a present, spiritual form of the Davidic Kingdom. *First*, the word "kingdom" (*basileia*) is absent from the context. The Gospels employ this word many times

when speaking of the kingdom's nearness or its ultimate establishment (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 24:14; 25:34; 26:29; Luke 10:9). Thus, we might expect the use of this important term somewhere in the immediate context had it been Christ's intention to here clearly convey a present, spiritual establishment of the Davidic Kingdom.

Second, the present age has little in common with the prophesied Davidic Kingdom. The prophesied Davidic Kingdom will be an age when Christ will rule in perfect justice with a rod of iron (Rev. 12:5). In that day, all rebellion will be instantaneously judged (Zech. 14:16-18; Rev. 20:7-9). By contrast, what is predicted for the present Church Age is ever increasing apostasy. Second Timothy 3:1 says, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come." Second Timothy 3:13 explains, "But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Thus, Paul in this final letter anticipates an increasing drifting away from truth throughout the Church Age. Paul also predicted this coming apostasy in the presence of the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:29-31).

If we are now in the Davidic Kingdom, then the deplorable spiritual condition of the churches in Revelation 2-3 is inexplicable. Five of these seven churches in Asia Minor are in an apostate condition. Some may question whether it is possible that Christ's church could so depart from truth that she is no longer governed by Him. Yet this very scenario was what was transpiring within the Laodicean church (Rev. 3:14-22). Here, Christ is depicted as standing outside the door of the church, knocking on the door, and seeking re-entry (Rev. 3:20). Evangelists often explain this verse as Christ as standing outside the heart of the unbeliever, knocking on the heart, and inviting the unbeliever to become a Christian. This is not a correct representation of the verse's context. Rather, it represents a church that has so apostatized from truth that Christ has been dethroned as the church's governing authority. Consequently, Christ is

portrayed as standing outside the door of *His own church* seeking re-admittance as ruler of *His own people*. In fact, "Laodicea" means "ruled by the people." Newell observes, "The name comes from *laos*, people, and *dikao*, to rule: the rule of the people: 'democracy,' in other words."³ Do these sad realities epitomize an "already" phase of the Davidic kingdom? Is what was happening in Corinth representative of the Davidic reign? Is the carnality and immaturity that is so prevalent in the typical local church (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-14) Christ's Davidic reign? These present realities do not correspond with what David was promised concerning the Messiah ruling with a rod of iron in perfect justice (Ps. 2:9). A proper understanding of the biblical predictions concerning Church Age apostasy represents a worldview that is diametrically opposed to "kingdom now" theology. The only way "kingdom-now" theology can be defended is to ignore what the New Testament predicts and describes concerning the church's apostasy.

Third, as noted throughout this series, a terrestrial, geo-political element involving national Israel is always included in the Old Testament's kingdom presentation. Such an abrupt change from understanding the kingdom as encompassing this physical reality to solely a spiritual reality of Jesus reigning in the church is tantamount to hermeneutically changing horses in midstream. Why would Christ introduce such a radical transition without any in-depth commentary explaining that such a transition was underway?

Fourth, the mere fact that Jesus was *granted* all authority just prior to His Ascension does not mean that He was exercising this authority in a regal sense. In other words, receiving authority (Matt. 28:18) and exercising authority are two completely different things. The author of the Book of Hebrews indicates that Christ in His present session following His Ascension was not yet exercising authority in His Davidic reign when he observes, "but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time

onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET" (Heb. 10:12-13). By here citing Psalm 110:1 with its inclusion of the word "until" (*heos*), the writer communicates that Christ had not yet entered the time in history when He will exercise authority over His enemies, which will be accomplished in His Davidic reign. Another commentary notes, "All authority has been given to Jesus, although He is not yet exercising all of it (Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 2:5-9; 10:12, 13; Rev. 3:21). He will manifest this power when He returns in all His glory (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 15:27, 28; Eph. 1:10)."⁴

Fifth, in context, Christ is exercising limited authority, not in His Davidic reign but rather in energizing the church to fulfill the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18 cannot be divorced from verses 19-20, which say, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." In fact, the word "therefore" (*oun*) at the beginning of verse 19 connects verses 19-20 back to verse 18. Because Christ had been granted all authority following His Resurrection, He used that authority in a limited sense only, not to establish His Davidic Kingdom in spiritual form but rather to empower the church to fulfill the Great Commission. The Great Commission is not to be confused with the Davidic Kingdom through Israel because "Instead of sending His disciples back to the house of Israel, they were sent into all the world."⁵

(To Be Continued...)

¹ Darrell Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, ed. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 61.

² Darrell Bock, "Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, ed. Hebert Bateman (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 223.

³ William Newell, *The Book of the Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1935), 75. See also Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 296.

⁴ Earl Radmacher, Ronald Allen, and H. Wayne House, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 1202.

⁵ Tim LaHaye, ed. *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG, 2001), 1163.