

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 19

THE REBELLION

It seems rather self-evident that God intended planet earth to be the location of a kingdom ruled by man as His representative, whether that was Adam as an individual human being or mankind in general. God, of course, knew the rebellion would occur and He had in place a plan established before the foundation of the world to restore this kingdom according to His original specifications. Kingdom prophecy is necessary in order to prepare mankind to assume a place in this yet to come Kingdom. If mankind had not rebelled in the first place, there would be no need for Kingdom prophecy. The point I will be making here is to show how the rebellion has resulted in the fact we are looking forward to life in the Kingdom rather than living in the Kingdom now. The Kingdom that was predicted by the Old Testament prophets and that Christ came to inaugurate is not here now.

Matthew 25:34 ³⁴“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

We also know the King was appointed to reign in this Kingdom before the foundation of the world. Jesus identified Himself as this King.

1 Peter 1:20 ²⁰For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you

Matthew 27:11 ¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And Jesus said to him, “It is as you say.”

Revelation 11:15 ¹⁵Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”

It was also known from before the foundation of the world there would be subjects in this Kingdom some of whom would be appointed to service.

Daniel 12:2 ²“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life ... [Old Testament saints]

Revelation 20:4 ⁴ ... And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead

and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.
[Tribulation saints]

Ephesians 1:4 ~~4~~just as He ~~chose~~ [appointed] us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. [church saints]

From these Scriptures, we know there will be a Kingdom that was prepared from the foundation of the world. That Kingdom will have a King who was appointed to be the King from the foundation of the world. That Kingdom will have subjects in it and it will have servants and rulers serving the King.

Anyone who teaches we are in the Kingdom now fails to understand the Kingdom program as the Bible presents it. This faulty understanding of the Kingdom has several sources. First, most theologians and pastors not only fail to understand dispensational distinctions, they reject them. They may not exactly embrace Replacement Theology, but they do put the church into the Kingdom offer Jesus made to Israel. For them, the Sermon on the Mount is a manifesto for the church in this age.

Placing the Kingdom in this age can lead to a false gospel of Lordship salvation or to a social gospel of works righteousness expressed by providing for the poor in various ways. Here is an example. A few years ago, the president of World Vision, Richard Stearns, wrote a book entitled *The Hole in the Gospel* and it is a good example of the damage done to both the Bible and the gospel when the Kingdom program of God is misunderstood.

Concerning the gospel, Stearns wrote, "When we talk today about proclaiming the gospel, we typically mean evangelism, a verbal proclamation of the good news of salvation and how it can be received by anyone by asking God's forgiveness and committing his or her life to Christ. But this is not the whole gospel" [*The Hole in the Gospel*, p. 21]. "Belief is not enough. Worship is not enough. Personal morality is not enough. And Christian community is not enough. God has always demanded more. ... [He called us] to change the world." [*The Hole in the Gospel*, p. 3]. A general understanding of the basis for his gospel is that God has called us to change the world and we do it by helping poor people. In another book, *Unfinished*, he wrote, "It [the gospel] is the whole story of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to the nations. The 'gospel,' or 'good news' of the kingdom, was the story that the king had come and that the kingdom was now open and available to all. ... Forgiveness and salvation are crucial parts of the whole story of Jesus, but they are not the whole story. We cannot limit Jesus to being our Savior but not our Lord and King." [*Unfinished*, pp. 65-66]. It is obvious this man has added to the gospel of salvation and changed it into a gospel of faith plus good works; this is what we often call Lordship salvation. In terms of the Kingdom, Stearns believes Jesus brought it into existence at His First Advent and it is the responsibility of those who belong to the Kingdom to do good works on behalf of those not in the Kingdom.

Misunderstanding the Kingdom and the Lord's Kingdom offer to Israel leads to the interpretation that the Sermon on the Mount is about the church. "Jesus cast a vision of how men and women could live in this new kingdom reality. The Sermon on the Mount,

by itself, represents perhaps the most revolutionary vision ever cast for the thriving of human society living in harmony with God. Along with the rest of Scripture, it serves as a blueprint for this new way to live in God's kingdom. ... The Sermon on the Mount encapsulates the heart of the good news of God's kingdom, a new vision of human flourishing in which men and women can build a different kind of community based on the foundation of God's truth, governed by God's principles, unified by God's Spirit, and committed to being God's ambassadors in the world." [Unfinished, pp. 72-73]. "But the good news Jesus proclaimed had a fullness beyond salvation and the forgiveness of sins; it also signified the coming of God's kingdom on earth. This new kingdom, characteristics of which were captured in the Beatitudes, would turn the existing world order upside down." [*The Hole in the Gospel*, p. 15].

Stearns relates the gospel to the Kingdom now. "The whole gospel is a vision for ushering in God's kingdom—now, not in some future time, and here, on earth, not in some distant heaven" [*The Hole in the Gospel*, p. 5].

This Kingdom now theology has to abuse more than the gospels and the Sermon on the Mount in order to justify it. Stearns wrote what he called an "author's paraphrase" of Matthew 28:19-20 that is not a paraphrase but a complete rewriting of the Scripture.

Matthew 28:19–20 ¹⁹"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

"Then ... before Jesus left, he commissioned his followers to take this good news of the kingdom of God to the whole world and to make it a reality. He essentially said, 'Go, do what I've told you to do, teach what I've taught you to teach, act as I've taught you to act, and love as I've shown you to love. Build my kingdom in all nations. This what you were made to do (Matt. 28:19-20, author's paraphrase)." [*Unfinished*, p. 52]. Jesus made no mention of the Kingdom in this commission; He was sending them out into the world in order to build a church. Stearns must put words into the Lord's mouth in order to make this commission about the Kingdom.

The extremes of the Charismatic and Pentecostal strains of theology have also been negatively influenced by the false doctrine of the Kingdom now. Because the Kingdom will be a time of prosperity and health and it will characterize the life God meant to be lived on earth, these theological systems claim these things for life now because they believe the Kingdom is here now. Here is an example by Myles Munroe entitled *Kingdom Principles: Understanding the Kingdom: Preparing for Kingdom Experience and Expansion*. The title alone should alert any serious Bible student that he grossly misunderstands the meaning of the Kingdom. He places a lot of emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount and the comfort, well-being, and prosperity of Christians living in this dispensation. This is a very common mistake on the part of Kingdom now proponents in the Word of Faith health and wealth gospel. The table of contents should also be a warning concerning the unbiblical presentation of the Kingdom. He uses Scripture to support these things but his interpretation of these supporting Scriptures is

based on the outcome he is trying to prove rather than on what the Scriptures are actually saying.

We will look at a few examples of this misunderstanding of the Kingdom as the Bible presents it. He uses Matthew 6:33 to state the first priority of Christians is to seek the Kingdom of Heaven [p. 29].

Matthew 6:33 ³³“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

“The Kingdom must be placed above everything else and should have not competition. It must be our highest priority.” [p. 30]. “In this biblical text, the word ‘kingdom’ as used by Jesus [in Mt. 6:33] refers to God’s government, God’s rulership, God’s dominion over the earth. The Kingdom of God means God’s will executed, God’s jurisdiction, Heaven’s influence, God’s administration, and God’s impact and influence.” [p. 31]. Without quibbling over the details of Munroe’s definition, it would be more accurate and applicable if he were applying it to the Messianic Kingdom that is yet to come which is the Kingdom Jesus was actually speaking about in Matthew 6:33.

“The secret to a full and fulfilled life is discovery, understanding, and application of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Religion postpones the Kingdom to a future experience. But you must remember that you cannot appropriate what you postpone. God’s desire for you is that you enter the Kingdom life *now* and experience, explore, apply, practice, and enjoy living with the benefits, promises, and privileges of Heaven on earth. Let the adventure begin!” [p. 35]. Notice how critical he is of any assertion the Kingdom is yet to come. In his mind, Kingdom now theology is the proper representation of Christianity in this age and those of us who believe the Kingdom is still future, are engaging in religious futility that apparently departs from biblical truth. For him, the Kingdom is now and it is here now in order to provide Kingdom benefits to believers. He makes the Kingdom all about us rather than all about the King.

“It [Mt. 6:33] contains the power to change the world. This is why Jesus spoke so frequently about the kingdom of God.... Through the Scriptures the whole kingdom is in sight. Jesus revealed to His disciples how to live in the kingdom of God even while they walked the earth. When we receive this revelation and begin to act on it, we will see the kingdom at work in the earth even in our own lives.... We will learn how to operate in the kingdom of God, which will provide everything we need in life to fulfill our God-given calling—everything from wisdom and understanding to peace, joy, health, abundant provision, and so much more.... It [this book] will result in miracles that will build God’s kingdom right here and right now.” [Bill Winston, *The Kingdom of God in You: Discover the Greatness of God’s Power Within*, pp. vii-viii]. Again, this pastor is teaching Kingdom now theology and appropriating all the Kingdom blessings for the church today.

Word of faith theology does not understand that Jesus came to offer the Kingdom of God to the Jewish people and this was the Messianic Kingdom that was long predicted and awaited by and for the Jewish people. He didn't bring the Kingdom; He brought the Kingdom near and it was rejected; therefore, it is still a Kingdom that will be realized in the future.

Another problem with the Kingdom now understanding of God's program is it leads to the false signs, wonders, and miracles movement. The thinking is that since the Kingdom is a time of signs, wonders, and miracles and since the Kingdom is now, then signs, wonders, and miracles are now as well. It is the same thinking that claims we should be able to enjoy the health and wealth of the Kingdom now.

Matthew 12:28²⁸“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Mark 16:20²⁰“And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed. And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.

Acts 4:29–30²⁹“And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, ³⁰while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

“The Holy Spirit encompasses the Kingdom [in the sense of the presence of the charismata and miracles]. While they are not the same, they are inseparable. The Holy Spirit enforces the lordship of Jesus, marking His territory with liberty. The *king's domain* becomes evident through His work.... As our ministry teams travel around the world, we have come to expect certain things. Healing, deliverance, and conversions are the fruits of our labors. While healing is seldom the subject we teach on, it is one of the most common results. As we proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God, people get well. The Father seems to say, *Amen!* To His own message by confirming the word with power. Peter knew this when he prayed for boldness in his preaching, expecting that God would respond by ‘extending His hand to heal, and signs and wonders would be done in the name of His holy servant Jesus.’ God has promised to back up our message with power if our message is the gospel of His kingdom.” [Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles*, pp. 73, 89].

This man has substituted the gospel of grace for what he calls “the gospel of His kingdom.” Because he believes we are in the Kingdom now, he believes that Kingdom miracles should be occurring now as well.

People may wonder what all the fuss is about. Why is important to understand the Kingdom to be a future Kingdom? It's important because these theologians are all playing right into Satan's hands. Anytime he can divert people from the truth of the Word of God, he has diverted them from serving God to the fullest extent possible. If he is successful in getting people to deny the true nature of the Kingdom, he has invited people to delve, to some extent, into Replacement Theology. Even if people are confused and believe Israel has a future, they are *de facto* denying it by adhering to Kingdom now theology. If the Kingdom is now, then the Messianic Kingdom the way the Bible presents it has been eliminated, in their theology, from God's program. Any time Satan can pervert biblical truth and divert attention to unbiblical areas, he has scored a victory to some degree. In the above examples, Kingdom now theology led to perverted gospels of social action and the prosperity gospel and to an unbiblical understanding of signs, miracles, and wonders. False gospels obviously lead people away from Christ and away from eternal life. Overemphasizing the charismata keeps people from devoting time to matters that truly glorify Christ. The point is, Satan's rebellion is still alive and well on planet earth and perverting the doctrine of the Kingdom is part of it.

God created man and appointed him to rule over the earth portion of His creation which set the stage for the rebellion.

Genesis 1:26–28 ²⁶Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Some theologians believe Satan's rebellion happened between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 necessitating a recreation, chronicled in v. 2 and the remainder of chapter 1, of the original verse 1 creation. In other words, God created the universe in verse 1 then Satan fell destroying the original creation and necessitating the recreation beginning in verse 2. Fruchtenbaum is one notable theologian who holds this view. It is better to view verse 1 as a summary verse for what follows and to understand "formless and void" to be the starting point for God's creative work. It is also likely that God created the angels during this week although the text is silent on that issue, and if true, would mean that Lucifer didn't exist before the creation week and thereby negating Fruchtenbaum's argument. After God finished His work during the creation week, He pronounced His work to be "very good." It seems unlikely that He would make that claim if sin had already entered His creation by virtue of the angelic rebellion.

Dennis Waltemeyer
Fredericksburg Bible Church