

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 22

KINGDOM PROPHECY, PART 3

I discovered some quotes from some ancient rabbinical writings that confirm the Jewish expectations the Messianic Kingdom promises would be fulfilled just as God promised they would be fulfilled. Those promises culminate in a Kingdom on earth.

“[In the days of Adam] there was as yet no devastation in the world, but it was then as it will be again be in the days of the Messiah, [may he come] quickly in our days. For about those days it is written, *He will swallow up death forever (Isa. 25:8).*” [Raphael Patai, *The Messianic Texts* quoted by Mal Couch, *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 282].

“It was inconceivable that the promises should not be fulfilled and that the Kingdom of Heaven upon the earth should not arrive. All Jewish groups believed this implicitly. The disagreement among them concerned only the date of the fulfillment and the means of its accomplishment. Whereas the Sadducees did not carry forward the messianic hope of prophecy.” [Michael Avi-Yonah and Zvi Baras, eds. *The Word History of the Jewish People: Society and Religion in the Second Temple Period Jewish History* quoted by Mal Couch, *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 282].

“Even Christianity, essentially messianic ... is the product of the great messianic promises. By reason of foreign influence [they are referring to the influence of pagan Greek philosophy on early Christian theologians which Orthodox Jews never embraced; Alexandrian Jews and some others did but never the Orthodox], however, it sought the messianic Kingdom of God in a way other than that of Judaism. While Jewish messianism is firmly rooted in this world, in earthly life, even in the ‘new world’ of the days of the Messiah, Christian messianism is a ‘kingdom not of this world.’” [Michael Avi-Yonah and Zvi Baras, eds. *The Word History of the Jewish People: Society and Religion in the Second Temple Period Jewish History* quoted by Mal Couch, *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 282].

These Jewish theologians are totally correct when they say Christianity is the product of the great covenanted, Messianic promises. The primary difference in terms of understanding the covenants is the Jews did not accept their Messiah when He came the first time; they will accept Him when He comes the second time. It is the majority of Christians who have departed from these Covenant truths.

A larger issue in play is the nature of God. If God can abrogate His promises to the Jews, which the Bible never says He does, the incorrect theological interpretations of Romans 9-11 and Galatians 6:16 notwithstanding, then what can stop Him from

abrogating the promises He made that has resulted in Christianity? That cannot be because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) but that theology has to suggest the possibility. Essentially, Replacement Theology rests on the accusation that God was untruthful when He made unconditional Covenant promises to the Jews.

Replacement Theology is also a denial of God's grace. They are suggesting that God's unconditional promises to Israel are not really unconditional because they are conditioned on the obedience and faithfulness of the Jewish nation in order to be fulfilled. In a way they are consistent, because most Replacement theologians also insist that Christians be obedient and faithful or they will either lose their salvation or prove they were never saved in the first place. Since when do any of God's promises to man concerning His unconditional promises depend on the works of human beings for fulfillment whether it was to the Old Testament period Jews or the New Testament period Gentiles?

Because some of the dispensational interpretations of Matthew 21:43 hinged, at least in part, on the erroneous distinction between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God, we will examine this issue. It has hermeneutical and prophetic implications and it has led to some serious attacks on dispensational theology because many early dispensationalists thought they saw significant differences between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God. In a way, it is much ado about nothing, but it is important to understand the issues for several reasons. First, it has given the opponents of dispensational theology some ammunition to use, rightly or wrongly, to attack dispensationalism. Second, it does generate not a little bit of confusion concerning the nature of the Messianic Kingdom and its timing. Third, it is an issue of historical importance for understanding the development of dispensational thought. Concerning the historical development of dispensational theology, the early dispensationalists made some extreme and unwarranted theological distinctions in this area. As we examine this issue, I don't want anyone to think I hold these men in low esteem; I do not. They did more in this modern era to enlighten people to the truth of the Word of God than anyone else. That fact, however, does not mean they were infallible. Where we need to disagree with their theology and correct it, we will do that.

As we begin this examination of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospels, the primary doctrinal thought to keep in mind is in the Gospels the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are both referring to the covenanted, Messianic Kingdom that was promised to Israel.

I have no idea where this dichotomy concerning the two Kingdoms referred to in the Gospels started but John Nelson Darby institutionalized it in terms of dispensational theology and I suspect this doctrine concerning the differences between the two started with him. He held an extreme view of the heavenly nature of the Church as opposed to the earthly nature of God's program for Israel. In his theology, Christians were not to be involved in the world's affairs. His understanding of this seems to be quite

extreme. It is true that positionally we are with Christ in the heavens, but we are experientially still living in this world where we are required to participate in life simply to survive not to mention thrive. Later dispensationalists such as Scofield and Chafer elaborated on this doctrinal dichotomy between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Scofield popularized this concept through the notes in his study Bible.

Darby believed that when the Jews rejected Christ's Kingdom offer at His First advent a different kingdom was established at that time which consisted of the church with Christ as its head. [John Nelson Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Matthew to John*]. Darby didn't like the idea of a dispensation of the church as a label "since the Church was to be taken *from* the earth, and the dispensations properly related to God's dealings with man *upon* the earth. Darby therefore preferred the word 'parenthesis' when describing the Church age. Whereas the Jewish dispensation had been designed 'to exhibit the government of God [on the earth] by means of an elect nation', the dispensation of the Church had been designed to gather *from* the earth 'a heavenly people' made up of Jews *and* Gentiles.... The distinction between Israel as the earthly people of God, and the Church as the heavenly people of God, is foundational to Darby's eschatology and was, in his mind, 'the hinge upon which the subject and the understanding of Scripture turns'. It would prove to be 'the mainspring' of his thought.... Darby stressed time and again that the Church had inherited *better* promises than Israel by virtue of her *spiritual* status, having been seated with Christ in heavenly, not earthly realms.... Henzel suggests that the Church's heavenly union with Christ 'became the lens through which [Darby] viewed all Biblical doctrine, colouring [sic] all of it in either the blue shades of heaven or the brown shades of earth.'" [Paul Richard Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby*, pp. 102, 115].

Darby, and the early dispensationalists following him, are not completely wrong concerning the dichotomy between Israel and earth and the Church and heaven, but they overemphasized it to the extent it caused some error in other areas such as believing a different kingdom exists now rather than a completely postponed Kingdom that will be initiated later.

Chafer explained his view (which was an erroneous view) about the differences between the two. "Two specific realms are in view as the doctrine of kingdom receives consideration: The Kingdom of God, which includes all intelligences in heaven or on earth who are willingly subject to God and The Kingdom of Heaven, which embraces any sort of empire that God may have on earth at a given time. The kingdom of heaven appears then in various aspects through the centuries..." [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 7:223]. It seems this concept is the result of theology rather than the development of an exegetical examination of the relevant biblical texts.

Chafer also taught that the parables of Matthew 13 were presenting a mystery form of the Kingdom of Heaven, but that is also incorrect. "A distinction should be made

between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. It is to be observed that Matthew employs the terminology *kingdom of heaven* and that Mark and Luke, when presenting much the same teaching, use the phraseology *kingdom of God*. Some have assumed on this basis that the two kingdoms are one and the same. However, the differences seem more important than the similarities. Entrance into the kingdom of God is by a birth from above (John 3:3), for instance, whereas to the Jew of Christ's day and in anticipation of His earthly kingdom entrance to the kingdom is based upon righteousness. [He then quotes Matthew 5:20].” [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 7:224]. The problem with this thinking is the parables were revealing new truth concerning the Kingdom of God (or Heaven) itself and not a new, or mystery, form of the Kingdom. Another problem with Dr. Chafer's position is that entrance into God's Kingdom has always been by faith, the new birth, and never by righteousness. This thinking is what caused many opponents of dispensational theology to accuse Scofield and Chafer of teaching two ways of salvation; one way for believers before the cross, by works righteousness, and another way after the cross, by faith and imputed righteousness. The righteousness Christ referred to in the Sermon on the Mount was His righteousness imputed to those who believe. No human being has any inherent righteousness, Jew or Gentile; they never have and they never will. The extreme dichotomy Chafer believed that existed between the use of two kingdoms in the Gospels and between Israel as only an earthly entity and the Church as only a heavenly entity led him into some erroneous conclusions concerning the Kingdom, Israel, and the Church. It also led to some serious attacks on dispensational theology.

Scofield really spread this false dichotomy between the Kingdom of God and Heaven by virtue of the notes on this issue he wrote for and placed in his study Bible. Today, we may not really understand the impact Scofield had on American Christianity early in the twentieth century, but it was huge. Many people were introduced to dispensational theology, premillennialism, a biblical understanding of God's Covenants with Israel, and prophecy concerning Israel and the end times through the notes he placed in his study Bible. Anti-dispensationalists wrote entire books attempting to discredit Scofield's theology and dispensationalism, to personally attack his character, and to refute the theology his notes presented. His importance in introducing people to a literal understanding of biblical truth is impossible to overemphasize.

Scofield's notes on the Kingdom of God claim it is to be distinguished from the Kingdom of Heaven in significant ways [information from the *Old Scofield Study Bible*, notes on Matthew 6:33, p. 1003]. Some of Scofield's notes have been modified in the new edition of the *Scofield Study Bible* but they have retained this perceived difference between the two kingdoms.

Scofield on the Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven, difference number one:

“The kingdom of God is universal, including all moral intelligences willingly subject to the will of God, whether angels, the Church, or saints of past or future dispensations.”

"... the kingdom of heaven is Messianic, mediatorial, and Davidic, and has for its object the establishment of the kingdom of God in the earth."

Difference number two:

"The kingdom of God is entered only by the new birth..."

"... the kingdom of heaven, during this age, is the sphere of a profession which may be real or false."

Neither of these definitions have anything to do with the biblical identification of the Messianic Kingdom. Everyone who comes to faith does so by virtue of the new birth whether Jew or Gentile and whether under the dispensation of Law or the dispensation of grace.

Difference number three: he presents differences based on where the kingdoms are mentioned in the Matthew 13 parables and which kingdoms are mentioned where.

"Since the kingdom of heaven is the earthly sphere of the universal kingdom of God, the two have almost all things in common. For this reason many parables and other teachings are spoken of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew, and of the kingdom of God in Mark and Luke. It is the omissions which are significant. The parables of the wheat and tares, and of the net (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50) are not spoken of the kingdom of God. In that kingdom there are neither tares nor bad fish. But the parable of the leaven (Mt. 13:33) is spoken of the kingdom of God, also, for, alas, even the true doctrines of the kingdom are leavened with the errors of which the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Herodians were the representatives."

He presents a contradictory argument in difference number three. First, he admits that the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew and the Kingdom of God in Mark and Luke refer to the same things but then he makes an argument from silence to say what is omitted creates the distinction between the two. Arguments from silence are never reliable because they rest on what the interpreter thinks they would have said if they had said it. We don't know why Mark and Luke included some information that is common to Matthew and some that is not except to say they had different audiences and had specific purposes in mind for their books. In terms of logic and debate, that is a completely invalid argument. It is almost a red herring, that is, the introduction of an irrelevant point into the discussion; what Mark and Luke do not say isn't pertinent because simply because it wasn't said. It is also an assumption meaning his readers are simply supposed to accept his argument that the omission of some parables between Matthew and the other two is significant. Finally, it represents some circular reasoning. Starting with the extreme dichotomy between the heavenly and the earthly, Christian and Jew, results in a faulty conclusion based on the presupposition that they represent

earth and heaven. In hermeneutics, presuppositions matter and this dichotomy isn't a good one to hold in this way. Obviously, the church and Israel are completely separate entities but to place one strictly in heaven and restrict one strictly to the earth is unsupportable.

Difference number four:

"The kingdom of God comes not with outward show, but is chiefly that which is inward and spiritual..."

"... the kingdom of heaven is organic, and is to be manifested in glory on the earth."

The Bible does not support these distinctions.

If you take the time to examine the Scriptures Scofield uses to justify these differences, they simply do not support his exegesis. He has imported his theology concerning the dichotomy he set up between Israel and the earth contrasted with the Church and heaven. Darby and Chafer both fell into this trap as well.

Simply cross referencing verses in parallel Scriptures from the Synoptic Gospels proves the point.

Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15 are parallel passages. Matthew uses "Kingdom of Heaven" to refer to the Messianic Kingdom and Mark uses "Kingdom of God" to make the same reference to the same Kingdom. The differences between the two promulgated by Darby, Scofield, and Chafer are not supported by the text.

Matthew 4:17 ¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Mark 1:15 ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10 are also parallel passages referring to the same Messianic Kingdom offer but using those two different Kingdom terms to identify it.

Matthew 13:11 ¹¹Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.

Mark 4:11 ¹¹And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,

Luke 8:10 ¹⁰And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND.

Fruchtenbaum describes the problem this faulty distinction has caused dispensational theology. "Some Dispensationalists, not understanding the Jewish frame of reference, have tried to make a distinction between the terms "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God." Covenant Theology has had a field day with this and have rightly challenged the validity of this distinction. They have correctly pointed out that by comparing parallel accounts in the gospels, it is obvious that the two terms are used interchangeably and are synonymous. On this point, Covenant Theology is correct, though some go too far when they claim that Dispensationalism stands or falls on this distinction and such a view is not germane to Dispensationalism. Chafer observed that "the phrase, *the kingdom of heaven*, is peculiar to the Gospel by Matthew" and this fact should have kept him clear of such an error, for Matthew wrote his gospel specifically to Jews while the others did not. Jews then, as Orthodox Jews today, are sensitive to the use of God's name or even the term "God." There is the tendency to use a substitute such as *HaShem* or *The Name* or even to write the noun as "G-d." This is exactly what Matthew was doing and so his "Kingdom of Heaven" means exactly the same as "Kingdom of God." While there are facets and distinctives within God's kingdom program, as even some Covenant Theologians have admitted, such distinctions are not to be based on a distinction between "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God." Most Dispensationalists today no longer make any such distinctions. Covenant Theologians are correct in criticizing this distinction, but overstate their case when they claim that by destroying the distinction, they, therefore, destroy Dispensationalism." [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* pp. 381-382].

Fruchtenbaum thinks the early dispensationalists erred due to their failure to understand the Jewish frame of reference of concerning the Kingdom offer. I believe Darby and Scofield and Chafer and the other theologians who followed their thought understood full well the Jewish frame of reference but they misapplied it in terms of informing their interpretations of these Scriptures by the extreme dichotomy between the earthly and the heavenly they held. This issue is larger than simply misunderstanding the Jewish frame of reference in the Gospels. It seems more likely to me, their problem was the sharp distinction they tried to make between the earthly and its Jewish context and the church and its heavenly context. There is some validity to this distinction in their theology but they carried it to an extreme that led to some faulty exegesis.

Oswald T. Allis specifically wrote a book to refute dispensational theology and *The Scofield Bible*. In this book, he addressed the issue of defining these two kingdoms in the Synoptic Gospels as a reference to different kingdoms in the plan of God and he referenced Scofield's notes to do it. This erroneous teaching about two different kingdoms has given Reformed theologians such as Allis some serious ammunition to use against dispensational theology, because in this instance, he is partially correct. "Both of these expressions occur a number of times in the New Testament. The one is confined to Matthew; the other is used rarely by him, but is found repeatedly in the other Gospels

and elsewhere in the New Testament. The view generally held is that these expressions are practically synonymous, and are used interchangeably. It would be natural that they would be. [He says that because he thinks there is only one Kingdom of God beginning in the Old Testament and continuing on into the new with the church replacing Israel. This is a serious error in its own right.] ... That the two expressions are equivalent is indicated especially clearly by the fact that they are used in synonymous parallelism in Matt. xix. 23f., and also because three of the parables which appear in Matt. xiii. as parables of the kingdom of heaven (the Sower, the Mustard Seed, and the Leaven) appear in Mark or Luke as parables of the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, the fact that both of these designations of the kingdom are used in the New Testament has been made the occasion for the most hairsplitting distinctions. Dispensationalists are obliged to admit that 'the two have almost all things in common.' But intricate and involved distinctions were nevertheless drawn by Darby as early as 1834; and he has been followed in the main by all Dispensationalists. [Allis published these words in 1945 and at that time he was generally correct. As Fruchtenbaum noted, that has changed today and few, if any, dispensationalists recognize this distinction.] [Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy & the Church*, pp. 66-69].

Ancient Orthodox Judaism never recognized any differences between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God in its Messianic Kingdom context.

"[In Daniel] world history in the course of five centuries passes before us as links in a single chain whose sole purpose is to bring to an end the dominion of the predatory beasts [the four great Gentile empires] and to establish the world dominion of God, an everlasting kingdom—'to perfect the world under the Kingdom of God'—a Kingdom of Heaven upon earth.... This renewed messianic idea, envisioned by the author of the book of Daniel, was to be echoed in its essential thrust in the literature that took its clue from it. Its influence on Christianity is unmistakable [sic]. Once Christianity, however, introduced a Greek element into Jewish monotheism it changed the basic concept of the kingdom of heaven which it had borrowed from Judaism [sic].... One must bear in mind, however, that these descriptions [of the Millennial Kingdom espoused in Christianity] are to be bound almost verbatim in early Tanaitic and midrashic sources." [Michael Avi-Yonah and Zvi Baras, eds. *The Word History of the Jewish People: Society and Religion in the Second Temple Period Jewish History* quoted by Mal Couch, *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 294-295].

Walvoord disagrees that the Messianic Kingdom is the Kingdom always in view in the Gospels. "While dispensationalists are apt to emphasize the term *kingdom of heaven* as relating to the future Messianic kingdom, the term also applies to the kingdom in the present age. Some of the quotations which the author [referring to George Eldon Ladd] includes show this. It is also true that the term *kingdom of God* is used both of the present age and of the future Messianic kingdom. In other words, neither the term *kingdom of God* nor *kingdom of heaven* is in itself a technical term applying to the Messianic kingdom. In the context of each instance it can be determined whether the

reference is to the present form of the kingdom or the future Messianic kingdom. The issue is whether there is a future form of this kingdom as the premillenarians believe. In affirming that there is such a future form of the kingdom the author and reviewer concur." [John F. Walvoord, "A Review of 'Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God'" in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 110, no. 437, p. 6]. I looked at all the verses in the Gospels that use "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" and every one is referring to the Messianic Kingdom. An examination of the NASB Bible concerning the use of the terms "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" does, in fact, reveal they are always used to refer to the covenanted, Messianic Kingdom. The term "Kingdom of Heaven" is used 32 times and only in the book of Matthew. "Kingdom of God" is used 52 times in the Gospels (Matthew 4 times, Luke 14 times, Mark 32 times, and John 2 times). "Kingdom of God" is used 14 times in the rest of the New Testament (Acts 6 times, Romans 1 time, 1 Corinthians 4 times, Galatians 1 time, Colossians 1 time, and 2 Thessalonians 1 time) and a cursory glance at them suggests they are all referring to the Messianic Kingdom as well.

There are two points I want to stress here concerning these two Kingdoms. First, when the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are spoken of in the Gospels, they are always referring to the covenanted Davidic, Messianic, Millennial Kingdom. They are not referring to some overall Kingdom of God; it is a specific reference and both refer to the same Kingdom. Second, anytime anyone, dispensationalists included, use a theological basis for interpreting the Scriptures rather than literal hermeneutics, error is the only possible result.

The Olivet Discourse has a lot of prophecy concerning Israel and the end of history, but one prophecy within it has been fulfilled when the Temple was destroyed in the 70 A.D. by the Romans. Obviously, the prophecies concerning the Tribulation and the end are all yet future. This is another example of a partial fulfillment of a prophecy by the Lord that awaits complete fulfillment in the future.

Matthew 24:2² And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

The Lord's prophecy concerning the establishment and building of His Church is also a prophecy that is in the process of being fulfilled and will not be completed until the last Gentile is saved and the Rapture of the Church occurs.

Matthew 16:18¹⁸ "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Concerning the idea that Christ is the Prophet Moses spoke about, Unger has identified seven ways in which Christ was like Moses and Constable has identified seven ways Christ was superior to Moses.

Unger identified seven ways in which Christ was like Moses. "(1) His life was spared in infancy (Exod. 2:1-10; Matt. 2:1-23). (2) He emptied Himself (Phil. 2:5-9), for he renounced a royal court to identify himself with his enslaved brothers, becoming a deliverer and a savior (Exod. 2:1-15, 3:10-12). (3) He was faithful (Heb. 3:2), and full of compassion and love (Num. 27:17; Matt. 9:36). (4) He spoke with God face to face, reflecting the divine glory (Exod. 34:33-34; Num. 12:8; 2 Cor. 3:7). (5) He was a mighty prophet in word and deed (cf. Luke 24:19), a revealer of God's will and purpose (Dt. 6:1; Rev. 1:1). (6) He was a mediator of the covenant (Dt. 29:1; Heb. 8:6-7). (7) He was a leader of the people (cf. Isa. 55:4).

Constable identified seven ways Christ was not like Moses but superior to him. "He provided salvation through His death. He arose from the dead. He ascended into heaven. He continued to give revelation from God after His death (through the New Testament prophets). He presently intercedes for His own. He will return for us. And He will literally bring us into God's presence." Thomas L. Constable, *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible*, p. 1:438].

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