

IS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

by

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CHAPTER ONE

THE KINGDOM OF GOD—ITS DEFINITION

John Watson's sentence, "Two finds have been made within recent years: the Divine Fatherhood and the Kingdom of God," involves a twofold error. "The Divine Fatherhood of God" by which he means the "universal Fatherhood of God" instead of being a theological "find" is a theological fiction! "**The Kingdom of God**" has never been lost to the church; only obscured, often, by misinterpretation.

If we may judge by His own words (Luke 4: 43), the most holy necessity laid upon Jesus was "**the preaching of the Kingdom of God**"; and if handling aright the word of God, means the conformity of teaching and preaching to the plan and points of Bible emphasis, then "**the Kingdom of God**" should never fail to hold the first place in the thought and instruction of Christendom.

If Prophet and Apostle are to be accepted as our inspired guides, theocracy—or God on the throne—is the scarlet thread in the Old and New Testament teaching. The Pentateuch presents no other plan; the Psalms sound no other note; the Major and Minor Prophets see no other vision; the Forerunner of Jesus framed no other philosophy, while the most matchless exponent of "**the Kingdom of God**" was the Master himself. The Word being consulted, the Kingdom of God is

*"The one far-off Divine event
To which the whole creation moves."*

It has been said that no definition of the Kingdom can be found in the Scriptures. Of course that depends upon what one means by a definition. If he is looking for a solitary passage that tells all that the Kingdom is, and all that it is not, the search will be in vain; but if he is comparing Scripture with Scripture to find out what the Kingdom is, then the Bible will be unworthy the title — "The Revelation" — were the effort not crowned with success.

It may be taken for granted that the term *Basileia*, which means "**kingdom**," is employed with discrimination by the divine writers. And when, by research, we find some form of this term used in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament 250 times in round numbers, and in the New Testament 160 times, and in the Gospels alone over 100 times, both the importance of the theme and the probable information to be derived from its study are more than suggested; they are certain.

The sympathetic study of all these texts would involve the definition of the Kingdom, reveal the evolution of the Kingdom, determine the location of the Kingdom, fix the citizenship of the Kingdom, and, setting up the Kingdom, seat the King.

We have said that it would involve

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showing that it will be at once an ideality and a reality; that it will be alike ethical and physical, and that it will find expression in both a theophany and a theocracy.

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This is a point at which post- and premillennialists part company. “**The Kingdom of God**” according to postmillennialists, is an ideality; according to premillennialists, it is both an ideality and a reality. The strongest book, from a *postmillennial* standpoint, brought from the press in many years, was Dr. Goodspeed’s volume, “*The Second Advent.*” Bruce may charm with his style, and Boardman impress one with his literary ability, his analytical and apparently logical methods; Snowden, Machen and many others with their show of learning, but Goodspeed had this splendid superiority, viz., that he dealt with the Scriptures.

Concerning the “**Kingdom of God,**” Goodspeed says,

“Postmillennialists believe that our Lord set up His Kingdom at His first coming, and that He took His seat as Ruler in this Kingdom, when He rose from the dead and all power was given into His hands. He is now seated on David’s throne, ruling the Kingdom of Grace, which is His only Kingdom on earth.”

Few postmillennial writers essentially dissent from this position. That circumstance is all the more remarkable when one remembers, as Bruce concedes, that the expression, “the Kingdom of Grace,” employed so insistently and by so many, is absolutely unknown to the Scriptures.

Boardman also concedes that the idea of a literal kingdom was the expectation of every Old Testament sage and prophet;

- Was in the minds of the Eastern Magi when they came asking, “**Where is he that is born King of the Jews?**”;
- Was with the devout Simeon when he looked for the consolation of Israel;
- Was entertained by Nathanael when he exclaimed, “**Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel!**”
- John believed it when he asked, “**Art thou the Coming One or look we for another?**”;
- The guest at the Pharisee’s table thought it, when he said, “**Blessed is He who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.**”
- It was the conception of the twelve when they contended with each other as to who should be counted “**greatest in the coming kingdom**”;

- It was the opinion. James and John, when they requested: “**Grant, unto us that the one shall sit on thy right hand and the other on thy left in thy kingdom**”;
- It was the hope of the Pharisees when they asked Jesus, “**When the kingdom of God comes,**” etc.;
- Of the crowd when they shouted, “**Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel,**”
- Of the disciples when they asked their risen Savior, “**Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?**”

The charge that these all alike misconceived the promised kingdom, require proof.

The prophecies of the Old Testament had not been difficult to understand, and were not commonly misinterpreted. Notwithstanding the fact that the leaders of Israel looked for the establishment of a temporal throne at the first appearance of Jesus, they neither forgot nor misconstrued the essential facts of that appearance.

When Herod, alarmed for his supremacy, inquired where the King of the Jews should be born, the Scribes properly replied, “**In Bethlehem, of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, Out of thee shalt come forth a Governor that shall rule my people Israel.**”

The hardships of His humble life were also in literal accord with Isaiah’s speech, “**Butter and honey shall he eat.**” His crucifixion between malefactors, and burial in Joseph’s tomb, the same prophet had predicted: “**And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death.**”

Only those that reject the inspiration of the Word of God deny the fulfillment of the prophecy, “**For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption**” (Psalm 16:10); or dispute the correction of Paul’s literal interpretation of the Old Testament Scripture that He should be “**raised**” on the third day (I Corinthians 15: 4).

If every Old Testament sage and prophet and every New Testament believer were mistaken in expecting a literal kingdom, is it conceivable that Jesus should have left this mistake without a word of correction, and even confirmed the misconception by personal speech, which if literally received, would keep up the error? Such conduct did not commonly characterize Christ.

Whenever He used a figure of speech, and His auditors misinterpreted it, He took pains to correct them instantly. When He declared concerning Lazarus, “**He sleepeth,**” and they answered, “**Then he doeth well,**” He immediately set their thought right by saying plainly, “**Lazarus is dead.**”

When he used the figure of leaven, and His disciples thought He meant that which was put into bread, He carefully corrected them by saying, “No, I mean the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

If there had been no actual Kingdom to come would not Christ have said, “Ye have misunderstood the word—My Kingdom is not a literal one; it is only spiritual”?

If it be answered that Jesus did say, “**My Kingdom is not of this world**” we reply, ‘That is no proof that it was “**not of the world**” and yet “**He was in the world!**” as employed in the New Testament, commonly means partaking of its evil spirit, and has no reference whatever to location. On His own authority His disciples were “**not of the world**” and yet they were in it. He was “**not of the world**” and yet “**He was in the world!**”

There is not a feature of a literal kingdom lacking in the biblical description of the Kingdom of God.

- It is to have a literal King in the person of Jesus, who is not a pure spirit, but God manifest in the flesh, “**and the government shall be upon his shoulder**” (Isaiah 9: 6).
- It is to have a literal throne, to which Jesus shall succeed, and it is not “**the throne of Grace**” but “**the throne of David**” (Isaiah 9: 7).
- There is to be a literal location for that throne— “**The Lord himself shall reign in Mount Zion in Jerusalem**” (Isaiah 24:23).
- The supremacy is to cover a real dominion “**from the River to the ends of the earth**” (Zechariah 9:10).
- This office of authority is to have its real aides in the persons of certain regenerate ones, that shall “**sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel**” (Matthew 12:28); In the most faithful who shall “**have authority over cities**” (Luke 19:17); and from the martyrs who shall “**reign with Him a thousand years**” (Revelation 20:4).

The impression that a reign of grace is incompatible with the exercise of real regal authority and command is disproven by the history of every good king. King Oscar of Sweden passed away years since; and either the tributes paid to his blessed memory by the citizens of his own land and the Swedish sojourners in our own country, were sickly adulations, or else it is possible to so combine the exercise of official authority with the exhibitions of love as to command at once a political obedience and a personal affection.

It will be alike physical and ethical.

The unwarranted custom of spiritualizing Scripture has resulted, for those who employ it, in the disemboweling of plain speech. The statement, “The Kingdom of Heaven is spiritual—a reign in men’s hearts—and not material over earth as a territory” (See Goodspeed, p. Ill), overlooks the biblical distinction of the terms Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God, and is an attempt to exalt the moral at the expense of the material, which is neither warranted by the Word nor essential to the ethical meaning of Christ’s ministry.

True, it is written of the kingdom of God, “**It is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost!**” But that does not signify that no eating or drinking shall characterize that Kingdom when it shall come, any more than Jesus’ statement, “**The life is more than meat: and the body more than raiment,**” is a warrant for attempting to live without food or clothing. The truth is that Jesus, in His risen body, did eat—a hint at least that the Kingdom saints may do the same. His promise is, “**Ye may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom**” (Luke 22:30).

We have already seen that the statement concerning the Kingdom that **“it is not of this world”** in no wise militates against its location **“in the world?”** any more than the statement that His disciples were **“not of the world.”** To be sure, those that are fitted for the Kingdom must be regenerate according to John 3:3-5, as Goodspeed argues. But does regeneracy dispense with the flesh? And, they must be righteous (Matthew 5: 20), but does righteousness militate against reality? If position in this kingdom is gained through meekness and humility (Matthew 18: 4), does anyone imagine that either trait inheres only in the immaterial?

If, therefore, the subjects of the Kingdom are to be as physical as were the flesh and bones of Christ, which He bade the unbelieving handle and see, then who dares say that **“the kingdom”** “is not territorial” as well as spiritual; that “its enlargement is not by taking in new lands, as well as new hearts,” and that in order to its establishment, “Christ need not come again in person” (See Goodspeed, p. 114).

The subject of His personal return would hardly seem to be in dispute since He has expressly said, **“I will come again”** and Paul has associated **“His appearance and His kingdom”** (II Timothy 4:1), and His own parable of the pounds involves the plain teaching that He has gone **“to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.”**

If He is not to make conquest in new lands as well as in new hearts, then the language of the seventy-second Psalm is strange indeed. It is written there that **“He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall bring presents. The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve him”**

I believe with Prof. H. Lummis that if there were but a single Old Testament prophecy of this Kingdom, and that the prophecy of Daniel, it would dispel all doubt as to its literalness and its location.

When Pharaoh had a dream of the seven fat and the seven lean kine, And Joseph interpreted it, his prophecy became the mold of history. Its fulfillment was literal. Who has been instructed to say that Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is not to be so taken?

It would almost loom that the great prophet Daniel anticipated the modern spiritualizing method and meant to condemn it when, after having interpreted the dream, he concludes, **“The great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter, and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure”** (Daniel 2: 45). A large part of that prophecy has been literally fulfilled! It is a strange thing to ask the privilege of stepping into the middle of God’s processes to declare that the remainder of it will be after another method.

Concerning the argument that since the prophecies about the birth, life and death of our Lord were literally fulfilled, we should expect the same concerning the Kingdom. Dr. Goodspeed says, **“Those prophecies were incapable of any other than a literal fulfillment”** (p. 93).

But every reformed Jew will tell you they never were intended to be taken literally; and his statement has exactly as much warrant from the Word as has the position of those that proclaim against **“the Kingdom”** for which all Christendom, in obedience to its Christ, is praying **“Come!”**

Discredit the pseudo-political phase of this kingdom as you will, still even John Watson is compelled to admit that “politics are, after all, a necessary machinery . . . though ideals come first.”

His statement, “When Jesus denied himself to politics he did not abdicate His Kingdom,” is without occasion!

True, He scorned the world’s throne when offered by Satan; He also refused the crown and sceptre proffered by an unregenerate mob; but He never hinted that He would reject these same insignias of power when the time of the Divine appointment should come. On the contrary, the Scriptures are clear that when, in the end of the age, the seventh angel soundeth, there will be heard great voices in heaven saying, **“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever”** (Revelation 11:15).

That this is a promise to the Man from Nazareth could hardly be doubted when it is remembered that on the occasion of the announcement of Mary’s conception, the Angel said, **“And thou shalt bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David . . . and of His kingdom there shall be no end”** (Luke 1:31-33).

It is both a theophany and a theocracy.

- A theophany is a *manifestation of God* to, or rather, through, the human soul.
- A theocracy is the *recognition of God as the only rightful Ruler*, and a reception of His revelation as civil law.

So far as the Kingdom of God has any place in the earth at the present time, it is a theophany, or a manifestation of God’s sovereignty in, or through, His saints. But the Holy Scriptures have ever held before believers the sure promise of a theocracy—a pledge to the Prince of Peace—**“the child born”** and **“the son given”**—that **“the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgment and with righteousness from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this”** (Isaiah 9:6-7).

But are we not told expressly that **“the kingdom of God cometh not with observation”**?

Certainly! That is the proof that the Kingdom is not yet; and is not to be confounded with the Church, nor with any of the visible fruits of a spiritual life.

Such may be easily observed, and somewhat accurately measured. But the introduction of “**the Kingdom**” is rather to be associated with the sudden appearance of Jesus Christ, the coming of which is as incapable of observation as is the formation of that lightning, that, in an unexpected moment, bursts into glory, “**from the East and is seen even unto the west**” (Matthew 24:27).

It is little wonder that the people who believe that the only Kingdom of God referred to in the Bible is that which is now being constructed by Christian endeavor, become discouraged.

Inadvertently Bruce concedes that no other result can be expected. He says,

“When John spoke of the Kingdom he meant the people of Israel converted to righteousness, and in consequence blessed with national prosperity. And that being his ideal and aim, he was a gloomy man, and those who were about him became affected with his gloom. For he saw, too soon and too well, that the conversion of Israel to righteousness was a very improbable event. And so, despairing of the nation, and hoping only for the salvation of a small remnant, he began to talk of ‘a winnowing fan to separate wheat from chaff, and of an axe of judgment to hew down the worthless tree.’”

While misinterpreting John, Bruce accurately exploits the result of looking for a kingdom that is dependent upon the conversion of the whole people to righteousness. If the Bible proffers us nothing better, the present outlook is gloomy enough to generate poignant grief. For two thousand years the Church has been at work in the world, and we are still praying, with good occasion, “**Thy kingdom come.**”

Three to four hundred millions of earth’s inhabitants are nominally Christian! It has been said, with sufficient conservatism, that perhaps not more than one in ten, or thirty to forty millions, of these are genuinely loyal to God, being regenerate by His Spirit, leaving practically the whole of the eighteen hundred millions yet to be converted before the Kingdom has fully come.

If to this it be answered: “But the times past have been those of seed-sowing and the centuries are now ripening to the harvest, false religions are just ready to fall, and the religion of Christ to become the faith of all nations,” we ask for the evidence!

The Christianity of Palestine perished on the very soil that sprouted it; the Christianity of Rome became corrupt at the very time when the Church was in the place of power; the Christianity of Europe is being discredited at this moment, and assigned a place in the Pantheon of Religions by its own and leading apostles.

The subject of ever-insistent debate in America is whether the candidates for the ministry are not diminishing, and the denominations—which are all too slowly increasing their numbers—are not as certainly going into spiritual decay. Horton (“*Teachings of Jesus,*” p. 27) frankly admits:

“Today a Christian country is one in which a majority of the people appear absolutely indifferent to religion; a majority of those who are not indifferent are without enthusiasm, without passion, without zeal; while the most earnest are usually sectarian rather than religious, capable only of interest in their church or their system or their shibboleth.”

Over fifty years ago, in that matchless conference called by Nathaniel West and others, a speaker raised this question,

“Do the possible thirty millions of genuine Christians give enough to make all the gifts of all the rest average a cent a week for the thirty millions for mission effort, properly so-called? Do the aggregates of all the purely missionary contributions of the world amount to \$15,600,000 per annum?”

The pitiful thing about this question is that after all the boasted progress of these most remarkable years, the interrogation is pertinent still; while the question with which he followed it is nothing less than painful

“Is the amount paid over by actual Christians, that Christ’s mandate, ‘**Go ye into all the world and preach my gospel to every creature,**’ may be obeyed as great as is the amount expended by the Church of God for needless—nay, for dangerous and degrading luxuries, such as wine, or tobacco, or even stronger stimulants?”

If you declare “This is pessimism”; I answer, “For those that have no other prospect than a Kingdom resulting from the regeneration of the whole world, it is!” But not for those of us that know that when “**this gospel of the kingdom shall have been preached in all the world for a witness, then shall the end of the age come.**”

It shall terminate with the appearance of the King Himself, the establishment of His throne in righteousness, the lifting of the deception that has blinded sinners till now, by the chaining of Satan—the old deceiver—and the casting of him into the pit that he shall do his work no more.

- Then “**shall a nation be born in a day?**”

- Then shall that major promise of the Minor Prophet speedily be verified, and “**the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea**” (Habakkuk 2:14).

- Then shall Daniel’s vision be realized (Daniel 2:1).

If one argues, as some do, that this prospect is too material to be pleasing, we only answer by expressing our regret that God’s appointments are not his pleasure.

If he say further, “It is too sensual to be spiritual,” we reply by questioning, “Is it scriptural?”

There may be such a thing as learning at last that God’s spiritual Kingdom is all the more glorious because of its material side, and the outlook of those that entertain this “**blessed hope**” may prove at last to have been just as broad as biblical.

Prof. Lummis says, “Many a visitor has ascended the slope of Mt. Washington, drawn by the snorting iron horse whose neighing echoed back from cliff and ravine, and has seen that rugged, rock-crowned summit, gray with the mosses and lichens of unnumbered centuries, as the misty robe that draped the giant peak was lifted by the careering winds.

“He has a right to speak of the sublime view which he has seen. But he has made only one ascent; he has looked from one position only, although a favored spot it may be, and one that affords the finest view of the Monarch of New England hills. But if he forgets or ignores the carriage road up from the Glen House; if he overlooks the bridle path that winds up through the wooded hills and bending valleys and steep, precipitous acclivities from the Crawford; if he counts not the devious footway of the lone pedestrian who, by some hitherto untrodden course, has clambered to the crown of the mountain king, he has not a complete picture of the loftiest of the White Hills.”

The modern theologian who conceiving the Kingdom of Jesus, looks upward and views the blue sky and gold and crimson clouds, and the brightness of the resplendent sun, has a charming picture, even if it be a little ethereal. But to complete its beauty he needs the hills and valleys, flowing as of old in the land of Canaan, with the milk and honey; the palace towers of Jerusalem, the golden, white-robed company marching with crowns on their heads and with palms in their hands to the strains of celestial music; the opening doors of the royal mansion, and the broad table spread with ambrosial viands, fit for the children and the brothers and sisters of a King; and the seated guests, the patriarchs and prophets, and all the godly race.

No timidity induced by skepticism within the nominal Church of God, or without, shall make me ‘minish aught of what my Father’s legacy warrants me to expect. I shall see the King in all His glory, and be fellow-heir with Abraham. In company with the meek I shall possess the earth. A humble and unworthy brother of Jesus Christ, I am to have the body of my humiliation made like the body of His glory.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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