

The Church and the Kingdom

by Roy Knight

This will not be an exhaustive study on God's Kingdom for it would take a book to do so but hopefully it will be enough for one to appreciate His Kingdom as seen in His Church.

Daniel's Four Kingdoms

To truly appreciate what is being said in this section, I would encourage you to read Daniel 2:24-45 in your own Bible. In short, Nebuchadnezzar the king had a dream and the only one who could interpret it was Daniel. Daniel told the king that the great statue which he saw was made of different material was a prophecy of the future. Daniel said that the head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar himself who stood as the head of the Babylonian Empire. Yet there would be another empire inferior to his that would arise which represented the chest and arms of silver (2:32, 39). This would be the Medo-Persian Empire (5:30-31). Following this empire, there would arise another empire which is represented in the belly and thighs of bronze (2:32, 39). This empire would be Alexander the Great's Grecian Empire (8:21; 10:20; 11:2). And finally, Daniel said a fourth empire would rise that was represented in the legs of iron and feet of iron and clay (2:33; 2:40-43). (*) This would be none other than the Roman Empire under which the entirety of the New Testament was written.

Daniel goes on to say in 2:44, *"And in the days of these kings (the emperors of Rome) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."* During the time of the Roman Empire, God would set up His own kingdom that would stand forever.

The Pronouncements of God's Kingdom

During the time of the Roman Empire, John the Baptizer came preaching in Matthew 3:2, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"* It should be obvious that when a thing is "at hand" it means that it is something that is shortly to come to past. Thus John is saying that in relation to his day that the "kingdom of heaven" or God's kingdom is quickly approaching. Jesus preached these same exact words in Matthew 4:17, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"* There are those who do not understand the concept of God's kingdom who would say "Yes but 2 Peter 3:8 says, '...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'" Why would both John and Jesus preach that the kingdom was "at hand" yet mean that it was still over 2,000 years in the future. There is no logic to this whatsoever. 2 Peter 3:8 is taken out of context here.

Both John and Jesus meant what they said: that the kingdom was truly "at hand." Remember as well that when Jesus picked His apostles that He commanded them to go preach that *"The kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 10:7). Later, Jesus would teach parables that highlighted the character of His soon to come kingdom. On Matthew 13:24, Jesus taught the parables of the Wheat and the Tares, The Mustard Seed, The Leaven, The Hid-

den Treasure, The Pearl of Great Price and The Dragnet. Each of these parables begin with the phrase "The kingdom of heaven is like". Each of these parables seek to explain the nature of the kingdom that would soon be established.

I Will Build My Church

In Matthew 16, Jesus has an interesting conversation with His disciples.

Verses 13-17 reads, *"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?'"* 14 *So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" 15 He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'"* 16 *Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" 17 Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."*

Verse 18 goes on to say, *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."* Jesus said that, not upon Peter as some would claim, but upon his confession that Jesus was *"the Christ, the son of the living God"* that He would build His church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it. It is interesting to note that the same thing is said of God's kingdom in Daniel 2:44, *"and it shall stand forever."*

Let us consider Jesus' statement, *"I will build My church."* "I" means that He would personally build it. "Will build" shows future tense and that it was not in existence at the time He spoke this. "My" indicates that the church will belong to Him and Him only. The word "Church" is people who are called out from worldly-minded people by means of the gospel (Romans 1:16). How the idea of the Church and God's kingdom come together is found in verse 19 of this same chapter when Jesus says, *"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven..."*. Here Jesus is marrying together the two ideas of the church and the kingdom and showing that they are actually one. If not, why would Jesus build His Church and give His apostles the keys to something entirely different?

Get Ready!

Again, showing the imminent coming of the kingdom, Jesus said in Mark 9:1, *"Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power."* Remember, Jesus is not talking to you and me here. He is talking to those to whom He is speaking. Those who are surrounding Him at that time. He is saying that the kingdom would come within their life time.

Notice also that the kingdom would come *"with power"*. Jesus in His departing words told His apostles in Luke 24:49 to, *"tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."* Luke would reiterate this promise in Acts 1:8 when Jesus spoke to His apostles saying, *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* Notice that both the instructions to and the promise of the Holy Spirit were only given to the twelve apostles in Luke 24 and here in Acts 1. Please observe as well that the focus of their last meeting before He ascended to heaven was the kingdom (Acts 1:3&6).

The Church, God's Kingdom

In Acts 2, the power that was promised by Jesus came in the form of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles by which they could speak the gospel of Christ in differing languages of those who were present. In preaching Christ to them and thus feeling the conviction of sin on their heart the multitude responded by saying, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" (37). The implied question is, "*Seeing that we have killed God's Son, what must we do to escape from His wrath?*" or in other words, "*What must we do to be saved?*" Peter responds by saying in the next verse, "*Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins...*" (The gift of the Holy Spirit is another study).

Since the church is "*the called out*", what Peter and the rest of the apostles are doing is calling by means of the gospel. Verse 41 says "*that day about 3,000 souls were added to them.*" Three thousands souls listened to the apostles' message to repent of their sins and to be baptized for the remission of their sins. As they became obedient to the message, it is said in verse 47 that, "*the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*" In so doing they were added to His kingdom since both are one in the same.

Those skeptical of this might say, "Well, there is no mention of the "kingdom" anywhere in Acts 2. And they are right. The word is not found in this chapter but it is found in Acts 1:3&6. The connection of the church and the kingdom has already been established in Matthew 16:18-19.

It is interesting that as the early Christians went about they preached the message of the kingdom. Acts 8:12 says, "*But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.*" Philip preached the things concerning the kingdom and people were baptized to enter that very same kingdom, the Church.

Can I Be in the Kingdom Today?

To those who would still insist that the kingdom is yet to come, let us consider the words of Paul when he said in Colossians 1:13 which says, "*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love...*" Here Paul is saying that not only he but his fellow Christians had already been conveyed into the kingdom. How did they get there if the kingdom is yet to come? How could he say they were already there? Because they had entered in to the Lord's church by repenting of their sins and being baptized to have them washed away and in so doing God added them to the church/kingdom (Acts 2:38&47). For Paul, this deliverance from the power of darkness and the conveying into the kingdom of the Son came in Acts 22:16 when Ananias told Paul to "*Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" That same deliverance from this world of darkness can happen to both you and I when we humbly submit to Christ and repent of our sins and be baptized for the remission of our sins. In so doing, God takes us and adds us to His kingdom, the church of Christ (Romans 16:16).

Other Churches Today

Over the centuries, other churches have risen and have put themselves in direct competition with the Lord's Church that was established in Acts 2. They claim a better plan of salvation or a more fulfilling worship experience. Yet all these new innovations only seek to take our eyes

from the Lord's Church and away from His Kingdom. How can hundreds of different so called "Christian" institutions be right? They cannot. It is up to us as individuals to seek out the Lord's Church that is found in the pages of our Bible and be added to it through the humble submission to God's word.

* As an aside, much is made of the toes of Nebuchadnezzar's statue being ten kingdoms that would emerge and form a union in our own future perhaps a European Common Market. Such a view is unfounded. It is interesting to note that in the vision that these empires come up one after another. How absurd it would be to conclude that four empires would arise one after another and then these ten toes would represent a union over 2,500 years removed from the last. Such would make for good book and movies sales in our time but it has no foundation in the time of Daniel.