

The Coming Kingdom of Christ our Lord

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When the Lord Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven" (Matt. 6:10), they understood basically what kind of a kingdom he was referring to. It was not the church, for that body of believers, composed of Jews and Gentiles together without distinction, was explained for the first time through Paul and the other apostles after the Day of Pentecost (eg. Eph. 3:1-10). Instead, it was the kingdom prophesied throughout the centuries of Old Testament history.

This rather obvious fact has been very difficult for the average Christian to believe. We have been told so often that the church is the kingdom that we easily assume that the church has replaced Israel forever as God's people. I am deeply grateful to God that this is not true, for if He can break His unconditional covenant promises to utterly unworthy Israel (cf. Gen. 22:15-18), then He can break His unconditional promises to the utterly unworthy church (cf. Phil. 1:6)! We praise Him now, and shall praise Him forever, because "the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

In one sense, believers today are already, judicially (*de jure*), in Christ's kingdom (cf. Col. 1:13), just as we are already seated with Him "in the heavenly *places*" (Eph. 1:3). But actually (*de facto*), we still await the day when He and His kingdom will appear on the earth. In other words, the kingdom is not yet here; it is still future.

Though the church has been "grafted in" God's program at the present time (Rom. 11:17), ethnic Israel will be reinstated into God's program in the future. The kingdom has not yet arrived. The Lord Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of the Father, but He is not yet seated upon the throne of David in Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 110:1; Luke 1:32; Heb. 10:12, 13). When His glorious kingdom finally comes to the earth in answer to the prayers of His

people, then not only redeemed and glorified Israelites, but also the glorified church under Christ her head and bridegroom, will have significant functions to perform.

For 1,000 years, the church – with glorified Old Testament saints and Israelite martyrs of the beast – will reign with Him over the earth (Rev. 20:4). Even the theologically and spiritually weak Corinthian church will exercise that function in the millennium: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" (1 Cor. 6:2).

Doubtless their regal and judicial position will be relatively low, for the Judgment Seat of Christ will bring to light all the hidden things of darkness and will determine the level of honor and privilege each saint will occupy during the kingdom (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 4:5).

Their eschatological ignorance was so profound that they actually viewed themselves – as opposed to the true apostles – to be above reproach in their regal lordship! Paul, with a touch of irony, told them: "You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!" (1 Cor. 4:8).

Yes, unbelievable though it may seem, all born again Christians (men, women and children) will function as kings under Christ during the coming kingdom age. Some have insisted that unworthy believers will be excluded from the wedding banquet and from the millennial kingship and will experience a temporary "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30) following the Judgment Seat of Christ at the beginning of the millennium. But if this is true, then the body of Christ, the true church, will be drastically divided.

Such a view reminds one of the partial rapture concept, whereby only worthy Christians are raptured before the tribulation. But who among us is truly worthy of redemption, rapture, glorification and reigning with Christ in the coming kingdom? If worthiness is the qualification, then there will be no rapture at all, nor will any Christian ever reign with Him.

Today, angels (both righteous and wicked) exercise enormous governmental powers over the world of mankind, under God (cf. Dan. 10; 1 John 5:19). But in the kingdom age, Satan and demons will have no access to man (except for "a little while" at the end of the millennium – Rev. 20:3). Righteous angels will presumably enter into a well-deserved retirement program for those 1,000 years, for "He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels" (Heb. 2:5), but rather to human beings!

Not only will we "reign," but we will also serve as "priests of God and of Christ" (Rev. 20:6). We will never be Levitical/Aaronic/Zadokian priests, for:

- 1) They will be physical descendants of Zadok, David's faithful high priest;
- 2) They will escape martyrdom during the 70th week of Daniel; and thus
- 3) They will be non-glorified, like other Israelites and Gentiles who survive to enter the kingdom (cf. Ezek. 44:15-31; Matt. 24:40, 41).

The prophet Jeremiah (of the non-Zadokian line of Abiathar priests in Anathoth) wrote: "Nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually" (Jer. 33:18).

Significantly, God will identify, save and seal 12,000 Levites by the middle of the 70th week (Rev. 7:7), even though Jews today have long lost their tribal identities (since A.D. 70).

In all the intricate descriptions of Zadokian priestly functions in the millennial temple in Ezekiel 43 to 46, there is not one word about a high priest. Ezekiel must have been fully aware of the prophecy of Ps. 110:4, that Messiah would be a Melchizedekian high priest, and Zechariah must have known this too (cf. Zech. 6:13). Under this absolutely unique high priest, we will doubtless intercede for non-glorified saints on the earth, even as Levitical priests interceded for Israelites in the pre-Pentecost era. This is a deep mystery and a marvel!

The precise function of the church during the kingdom age is not revealed to us. We do know that we will participate in the great inaugural banquet (Matt. 8:11; 26:29; Luke 13:28; 22:16, 18). How amazed the survivors of the tribulation will be to behold Christ's glorious bride, the church!

Beyond that, it seems reasonable to envision our Lord appearing in Jerusalem at least at the annual Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Ez. 45:25; Zech. 14:16), which always anticipated God's dwelling with His people.

And surely the bride will be with Him, for He promised us that "where I am, *there* you may be also" (John 14:3).

All we can say, in the light of such kingdom promises, is, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

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