

THE KINGDOM

Paul declared that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 15:50). Thus, "THE KINGDOM" cannot merely be the millennium, with its flesh-and-blood humans multiplying across the earth, much less the world of today taken over by Christians exercising dominion.

We are told many times in the Bible that God's kingdom "is an everlasting kingdom". Of the coming Messiah, Isaiah prophesied that there would be no end - both to His kingdom and to the peace it established (Isaiah 9:6-7). On this count also "the kingdom" cannot be the millennium, for that wonderful time of peace on earth as Christ reigns from Jerusalem not only ends, but with a great war (Revelation 20:7-9).

Jesus clearly said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Although the kingdom **begins in the hearts** (the spiritual aspect) of all who receive Christ as King, and although the millennium is the *initial* thousand year **phase** of the kingdom, the **outward manifestation** (the physical aspect) of this kingdom will not come *in its fullness* until God has destroyed this present universe at the end of the millennium (the end of the "Day of the LORD" which is a "day" of a thousand years duration) and created a new one into which sin and evil will never enter (II Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1; I Cor. 15:24-28, etc.).

The Scriptures call us to *that* kingdom, which cannot be established by our programs or efforts.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

We have noted the confusion among those of Christ's day concerning when, how, by whom, and for whom the kingdom of God would be established. That confusion remains in the church today. There are those, for example, who try to find a distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. In fact, there is no difference. The former is used exclusively by Matthew, but the other three Gospels say exactly the same thing about the kingdom of God that Matthew says about the kingdom of heaven.

Where is the kingdom? New Agers take Christ's statement "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21) to mean that the kingdom is a mystical reality inside of every person, a reality which may be experienced in a "higher state of consciousness." The Greek preposition *entos* could also be translated "among you" or "in your midst," and is easier to understand as such in this case. Christ the King, and thus the kingdom, was in their midst, unrecognized. Of course, the kingdom of God does exist in every heart that has received Christ the King. On the other hand, it would be both unbiblical and unreasonable to suggest that the kingdom of God is within individuals who have never received Christ but who, in fact, reject Him – which was the case with those to whom Christ addressed these words.

When is the kingdom? It is present within the hearts where Christ has entered and reigns. It will be visibly present upon the earth during the thousand years that Christ will reign from David's throne. The millennium, however, is not the ultimate manifestation of the kingdom because it comes to an end, whereas the Bible clearly and repeatedly states, "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom" (Psalm

145:23; Daniel 4:3,34; 2 Peter 1:11, etc.). Moreover, the millennium ends in a war, whereas the Bible declares that the kingdom involves peace that will never end (Isaiah 9:7; 32:17; etc.).

Further proof that the millennium is not the ultimate kingdom is found in Christ's statement that "except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3) nor can he enter into it (verse 5). Yet there will be an innumerable multitude upon the earth during the millennium who have not been born again and who will end up on the lake of fire, according to Revelation 20:7-15. Paul adds that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50, yet there will be many "flesh-and-blood" people alive on earth during the millennium – so gain it cannot be more than a temporary and earthly manifestation of the kingdom which is yet to come.

Ultimately the kingdom will be the entirely new universe that God will create to replace the present one when He destroys it (2 Peter 3:7-13). That fact is an integral part of the gospel we are to proclaim: that all of man's efforts to rescue planet Earth and to make it a beautiful, safe, and peaceful place in which to live are doomed. Man is called upon to be reconciled to God and to look to God to restore mankind to paradise. That is the "gospel of the kingdom" which Christ preached. Are we to preach it today as well, or was it only for that time? The simple answer is found in the fact that Christ preached the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:15; etc.), spoke of it after His resurrection (Acts 1:3), and commissioned His disciples to preach it (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15). That the apostles preached the gospel of the kingdom is stated repeatedly (Acts 8:12; 20:25; Romans 14:17; I Corinthians 4:20; Colossians 4:11; etc.), and this is the same gospel which we are required to preach today.