

What is The Kingdom



*A Collection of sermons preached by
W. E. Best*

Distributed Freely by:

Spring Assembly of Christ

<http://springassemblyofchrist.org>

October 2014

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Table of Contents

What is the Kingdom- Part One-----Pg. 1

What is the Kingdom- Part Two-----Pg. 6

What is the Kingdom- Part Three-----Pg. 11

What is the Kingdom- Part Four-----Pg. 15

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What Is The Kingdom? -- Part 1

W.E. Best

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church [assembly]; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:18-19 NASB Update).

What is the kingdom? The kingdom is not the church. Some people make no distinction between the two. The kingdom of God is something described in the Scriptures for the chosen of God to believe. Therefore, it is not one thing today and something entirely different tomorrow, not one thing in this dispensation and something entirely different in another dispensation.

The kingdom has been compared to a seed. Christ said, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows—how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:26-29 NASB). However, the original truth, which portrays certain things that are to transpire, prophecies to be fulfilled, and promises to be experienced, cannot be a mere germ which is to sprout into something entirely different. Could the prophecies or promises of the virgin birth, life, death, resurrection, and second coming be nothing more than mere germs which were to sprout into other things?

God’s description of the kingdom is unchangeably the same. Many formal statements have been made concerning the kingdom, but there is only one true definition. There is little agreement among exegetes concerning the meaning of the kingdom. This should be reason enough to drive any sincere believer to search the Scriptures for himself or herself.

Beware of subtle analogies! Many persons, possessed with subjectivism, object to the Scriptures as the infallible standard of man. These persons say that if scientists used this standard, it would curtail all scientific discoveries. However, such comparison is unjust when put on the level with Holy Scripture. Scripture is the most important thing in the world. It is God’s truth to mankind. Science cannot set up an infallible standard because such information is gathered by fallible men. By way of contrast, consider what Peter, Paul, and Job said—Peter, because he is being addressed within the context; Paul, because he has given us more of the New Testament epistles than anyone else; and Job, because his book is the oldest book in the Bible. Peter said, “And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved

by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (II Pet. 1:19-21 NASB). Paul said, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:16, 17 NASB). Job said, “But He [God] is unique and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, that He does” (Job 23:13 NASB).

God can never be absent from His people, either essentially or spiritually. However, He may be absent as to His discernible presence or the manifestation of His favor. This is illustrated in a wonderful way in the Song of Solomon. This book is a revelation of the chaste and virtuous love which no splendor can dazzle and no flattery can seduce. Christians are attracted to Christ not merely for what He has done for the elect, but because of who He is. He is the eternal Son of God. He is who He said He is—the only Savior and the only way to the Father. Song of Solomon is full of types, figures, and similitudes. Let us see what God says about His own in chapter 5.

Inspired by God, Solomon said, “I HAVE come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk. Eat, friends; Drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers. I was asleep, but my heart was awake. A voice! My beloved was knocking; Open to me, my sister, my darling, My dove, my perfect one! For my head is drenched with dew, My locks with the damp of the night. I have taken off my dress, How can I put it on again? I have washed my feet, How can I dirty them again? My beloved extended his hand through the opening, And my feelings were aroused for him. I arose to open to my beloved; And my hands dripped with myrrh, And my fingers with liquid myrrh, On the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved, But my beloved had turned away and had gone! My heart went out to him as he spoke. I searched for him but I did not find him; I called him, but he did not answer me. The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, They struck me and wounded me; The guardsman of the walls took away my shawl from me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved, As to what you will tell him: For I am lovesick” (Song of Solomon 5:1-8 NASB).

There are a few things in this passage to be pointed out. “I was asleep” (v. 2)—there are different kinds of sleep. There is the sleep of lethargy (Eph. 5:14), the sleep of unconcerned assembly members, and the sleep of watchlessness. When Samson went to sleep, he lost his power, his strength. The one in verse 2 should not have been asleep. “I have taken off my dress” (v. 3)—this is the dress of practical righteousness. “I have washed my feet” (v. 3)—her problem was that she had washed her own feet rather than the Lord washing them (John 13:3-10). In verses 6-8, she went outside and was found by the watchmen and abused. Finally, she said, “I am lovesick” (v. 8). When you have been born of God and His love has been poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit, you never cease to love Him. He never ceases to love you.

In the Song of Solomon 5:1, “I am come into my garden...” does not typify either the first advent or the second advent of Jesus Christ. It refers to a spiritual visit in the spiritual life of Christians between the advents. Let us look at the application of the types given in the Song of Solomon. John 13-17 covers the short period time before the death of

Christ. Christ said to His disciples, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him. Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us, and not to the world? Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:18-23 NASB). Do you see the harmony of the Old and New Testament Scriptures?

There is no enrichment that compares to that which is found beginning with Genesis 1:1 and concluding at Revelation 22:21. Job is considered to be the oldest book of the Bible. Job's name means "the cry of woe, one who has turned penitently to God." Men may debate who wrote it, but every child of God knows one thing for sure—God wrote the book of Job. The book shows how remarkably full the theological knowledge and intellectual culture of the patriarchal age were. Job recognized important things when he heard them. "Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! That with an iron stylus and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:23-26 NASB). Job knew three things: (1) that his Redeemer lives (v.25), (2) that He will stand on the earth at His first advent (v. 25), and (3) that He will stand on the earth from which the curse has been delivered, His second advent (v. 26).

The message of the book is the mystery of suffering. Although Job's acquaintances brought heated accusations against the patriarch, God intervened and made Job's latter end greater than his beginning (Job 42:7-17). True self-abhorrence comes not from self-examination but in looking away from self to Jesus Christ. Job was very much satisfied with himself until he saw the Lord. Isaiah describes it clearly in the following words: "In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple...Then I said, Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Is. 6:1, 5 NASB).

Job's final knowledge was not second hand. The eyes of his understanding had been enlightened. What he knew in his prosperity was little in comparison to what he had learned in the day of adversity. Job had repented: "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to Thee? I lay my hand on my mouth" (Job 40:4 NASB). The only way that pride can be abased is for the person to be brought face to face with the majesty of God. Jehovah's mode of dealing with Job is remarkable. The change in God's conduct toward Job was preceded by a change in Job. Formerly Job had justified himself, but now he justifies God. When God denies us temporal things for our spiritual good, it is a terrible sin to complain. When Job accepted the mystery, God gave him the victory. "And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning...And Job died, an old man and full of days" (Job 42:12, 17 NASB).

Peter, like Job, must learn some valuable lessons. Those lessons will come between the first and second advents of Jesus Christ. It is humbling to have our sin and restoration predicted. Christ, the Rock of Offense (I Pet. 2:8), subsequent to the institution of the Lord's Supper, said to the disciples, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED. But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee. But Peter answered and said to Him, Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away. Jesus said to him, Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times. Peter said to Him, Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny you. All the disciples said the same thing too" (Matt. 26:31-35 NASB). Peter argued with Christ when he did not know himself. However, before Christ completed His sifting of Peter, he was prepared to strengthen the brethren (Luke 22:31, 32).

The flesh is going to be exposed in God's people, because its untrustworthiness must be brought to light. At the same time, the removal of the chaff causes the faith to be more evident. Sifting describes the effect of temptation on a believer. It exposes his infirmities for the purpose of strengthening him spiritually. Therefore, before Christians can be of help to others, they must be sifted. This shows how Christ as Intercessor protects what has been given to Him in the eternal covenant of grace (John 17). He did not pray that Peter might escape the sifting, but that his faith might not fail (Luke 22:31, 32; I Pet. 1:3-5). Therefore, Peter was not preserved from but in the sifting. Here we learn the excellence of God-given faith. Satan hates the faith of God's elect. Paul introduced his letter to Titus by saying, "PAUL, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness" (Titus 1:1 NASB).

The keys of Matthew 16:19 are for the kingdom, not the assembly. The Greek word for keys is kleidas (noun accusative feminine plural of kleis), which is used to denote authority. It is used only six times in the New Testament—Matthew 16:19; Luke 11:52; and Revelation 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; and 20:1. To whom were the keys given? Some say they were given to Peter, and others say they were given to the assembly. There are those who say, "In Matthew 16:19, continuing the establishment, the Lord promised to give to members of the body the powers of administration. The church, inspired and God-breathed, carries the keys...." Another said, "God gave the church so much power that what she does on earth is approved by God in heaven."

In Matthew 16:18 and 19, the assembly is connected with the eschatological kingdom. The disciples had a foretaste of the kingdom in their experience on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-13). Hence, the attempt to identify the kingdom is very serious. Such authority could never be committed to imperfect men. The assembly must be perfected to reign with Christ over the nations of the earth. Church (assembly) history proves the evil and disaster of believing the imperfect assembly has the authority religionists claim.

In Matthew 18:18, the context limits the authority in three respects: (1) Context limits the authority to the local aspect of the assembly in time. (2) The authority of discipline is restricted to the affairs of the local assembly in time. (3) There is no mention of the keys of the kingdom. Therefore, in Matthew 16, the assembly is presented in its relation to the kingdom. In Matthew 18, the assembly is viewed in relation to its present responsibility. There is no guarantee of perpetuity and final victory of local assemblies in time (Rev. 2-3), but there is the guarantee of the perpetual duration (existence) of the body of Christ and final victory. There is no harmony between heaven and earth where discipline is lacking. What about preachers, missionaries, and evangelists who operate independently of local assemblies in time? Walvoord said, "A key was the sign of authority...Peter was told he would possess the keys and be able to bind and loose people...He carried out God's direction by proclaiming the gospel on the day of Pentecost." Roman Catholics say, "Sins are forgiven by the minister...through the power of the keys." A. T. Robertson said, "Jesus put into the hands of Peter and of all believers the keys of the Kingdom which we should use to open the door for those who wish to enter."— Word Pictures In the New Testament, Vol. V, p. 315

What Is The Kingdom? -- Part 2

W.E. Best

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church [assembly]; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:18-19 NASB Update).

Many formal statements have been made concerning the kingdom, but there is only one true definition. There is little agreement among theologians concerning the subject, but that does not discourage the diligent student of Scripture. No person can handle the Scriptures properly without the correct concept of the kingdom. The kingdom is not only the great theme of prophecy, it is also the object of the covenants. Therefore, the new covenant, operating in this age, is calling the elect of God the heirs of the kingdom. That makes the assembly of Matthew 16:18 the preparatory stage for the coming kingdom.

When all dreams of a utopia, preached by fallible men, are swept away by harsh reality, Biblical data concerning the kingdom will become the highest consideration of every born-again person. Just as the perfection of Christ's human nature cannot be denied by Christians, the perfection of Christ's work, which finds its completion in the kingdom, cannot be refuted. Therefore, the past and present are preparatory stages for the coming kingdom of Christ. One should be able to see and understand the verses we are now investigating. Christ said, “And I am also saying to you, you are Peter [Petros, masculine], and upon this rock [petra, feminine] I shall continue to build [progressive future active indicative of oikodomeo] My assembly [feminine]; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower [future active indicative] her [feminine]. I shall give [future active indicative of didomi] to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens; and whatever you may bind [aorist active subjunctive of deo] on the earth shall have already been bound [perfect passive participle of deo] in the heavens, and whatever you may loose [aorist active subjunctive of luo] on the earth shall have already been loosed [perfect passive participle of luo] in the heavens” (Matt. 16:18, 19—translation from the Greek). It is heretical to say either “We control heaven and bind hell” or “It is up to us, not up to God.” The Biblical fact is that everything starts with the sovereign God in heaven and is accomplished on earth. A television evangelist closed his sermon recently by saying, “I will never forget the day ‘I invited’ Jesus into my heart, and I have never been the same since.” Tears came to my eyes, not because I could relate with him, but because he does not understand the principle of Matthew 16:19. Everything begins with God's eternal purpose, not with us. Can a person choose to love God when at the same time he loves sin? In John 5:40, Christ said, “You are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life” (NASB). That shows the depth of the depravity of man. In John 6:44, Christ said, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (NASB). Apart from God, the sinner cannot come to Christ (John 6:44), cannot see the kingdom (John 3:3), cannot enter the kingdom (John 3:5), cannot hear God's words (John 8:43,

47), cannot cease from sin (II Pet. 2:14), and cannot understand spiritual things (I Cor. 2:14).

The parable of Luke 19:11-27 was given to correct the belief that some thought the kingdom would be set up immediately: "And while they were listening to these things, He went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves and gave them ten minas, and said to them, Do business with this until I come back. But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, We do not want this man to reign over us. And it came about that when he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done. And the first appeared, saying, Master, your mina has made ten minas more. And he said to him, Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Your mina, master, has made five minas. And he said to him also, And you are to be over five cities. And another came saying, Master, behold your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow. He said to him, By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow? Then why did you not put the money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest? And he said to the bystanders, Take the mina away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas. And they said to him, Master, he has ten minas already. I tell you, that to everyone who has shall more be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence" (NASB). The parable of the kingdom is added to Christ's message as to how He had come to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:1-10). Among the figurative forms of scriptural speech the parable has a notable preeminence. Parables are especially worthy of our study, since they were the chosen methods by which Christ set forth many revelations of His kingdom. The word "parable" comes from the Greek noun *parabole*, which means a comparing, comparing of one thing with another, likeness, or similitude. The verb *paraballo*, which means to throw or place by the side of, carries the idea of placing one thing by the side of another for the purpose of comparison. Outside the Gospels, the noun *parabole* is used only in Hebrews 9:9 and 11:19. The verb *paraballo* is used only in Mark 4:30 and Acts 20:15.

The general design of parables is to set forth great truths in attractive and important forms. This is true not only with such a great subject as the kingdom, but also of reproofs, rebukes, and warnings. (See Matt. 21:45; Luke 20:19; Mark 12:12.) Furthermore, parables have a twofold purpose: (1) to reveal and (2) to conceal. "And He [Christ] answered and said to them [the great multitudes], To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted" (Matt. 13:11 NASB). "At that time Jesus answered and said, I praise Thee O Father,

Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt. 11:25-27 NASB). “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God [Jesus Christ], who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:18 NASB).

Only one kingdom is presented as existing under the reign of Jesus Christ. Substitute such expressions as “God’s reign in the heart,” “the body of believers,” etc. for kingdom and see how ridiculous it is. There may be mysteries of the kingdom, while the kingdom itself may be known. The meaning of the kingdom was not a mystery to the disciples. There are many mysteries—something unknown. The mystery presented in Matthew 13 does not refer to the nature of the kingdom, but to the manner of its establishment, the means employed, the preparation for it, and the time of its establishment. Since the disciples were to be stewards of the mysteries of God under the teaching of Christ, it was necessary for them to know first of all what the kingdom itself was in their understanding. Paul said, “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Cor. 4:1 NASB).

Parables must not be made the first source of doctrine (teaching). Parables may be the outer ornamental covering, but not the main texture of proof. It is from the literal to the figurative, from the clearer to the obscure that has ever been recognized as the law of Scripture interpretation. This can be understood better by saying we often think of the Levitical sacrifices as providing the pattern for the sacrifice of Christ. This is not improper, but it does not give the correct perspective. The Levitical sacrifices were patterns of the things in heaven (Heb. 9:23). We must never forget that all that is of God has come from God. Therefore, the necessity of bloodshedding in the Levitical system was caused by the necessity in the higher realm. (See Heb. 1:1-3; 2:9-18; 9:9-14; 9:22-28.) This amplifies what has been said about Matthew 16:19 (also repeated in Matt. 18:18).

The student of spiritual things is requested to ponder parables. Mark said, “And with many such parables He [Christ] was speaking the word to them [disciples] as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples” (Mark 4:33, 34 NASB). The kingdom is one thing, and the mysteries pertaining to it are quite another. Neither covenant nor prophecy presents us a hidden kingdom. The apostles knew nothing of “a kingdom mystery.” The mystery of godliness (I Tim. 3:16) is known to believers, but there were some things about it that were unknown. For example, Luke records what the risen Christ said to the disciples in Acts 1:1-8. The kingdom was known to the disciples (Acts 1:3), but there were some things about it that were unknown.

The Acts of the Apostles is a record of events in a period of history which is transitional in certain important respects. How can there be a complete account of a Person’s work while He lives? Therefore, Acts is a record of events in a period of history which is

transitional. While every portion of Scripture is “profitable for teaching” (II Tim. 3:16 NASB), we shall find in Acts some events which are unique in their appointed time and place. They were never designed to serve as a permanent norm for the assembly of the present age. For example, the “day of Pentecost” has not been duplicated with all its apostolic powers.

Christ’s post-resurrection ministry lasted forty days. Luke said, “THE first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convicting proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:1-3 NASB). It is fitting that the “book of facts” (Luke) should be followed by the “book of Acts.” True believers prove their faith by their works (James 2).

The disciples could not harmonize Calvary and Christ’s resurrection with their hopes of the kingdom. That is why they asked, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6 NASB). There was one point upon which the apostles lacked information. It concerned the “time” of the kingdom’s restoration. This restoration of the kingdom could be nothing else but the theocratic kingdom of Old Testament history. The theocratic kingdom, from the view point of the Jews, was the kingdom that ended at the Babylonian captivity and was an organized government on earth in which the nation of Israel held the central and sovereign place under God. There was no rebuke or correction for their assumption.

Although Pentecost was an earnest of the coming kingdom, Jesus Christ is not, at this time, on earth ruling as King on David’s throne. The Jews did not deny Christ’s miracles (Matt. 21:12-17), but they argued that the source of His power was Beelzebul (Matt. 12:22-29). In answer to the problem present in the Jewish mind, how a crucified man could be the Messianic King of Israel, Peter used the resurrection of Christ to show His right to the throne of David. Both the death and resurrection had been seen by David (Ps. 16:8-11). To a second problem in the Jewish mind—If Christ is the Messiah, why is He not ruling on David’s throne?—Peter replied by referring to Psalm 110:1. “THE LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet” (Acts 2:34, 35 NASB). That has not yet been accomplished. The final problem that Peter had to face was the Jewish worship in the temple. Note the Christians in Acts 2:46—“And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple...” (NASB). They needed instruction because, according to Old Testament prophecy, all worship must be centered in the future kingdom (Is. 40; 56:7; Ezek. 47, 48; Micah 4:1-4; Acts 4:34-5:4). To the saved Jews at Pentecost, the Grand Jubilee of all the centuries seemed at hand. (Study Lev. 25.) Furthermore, these new converts to Christianity must have been encouraged in their expectation by the wonders and signs performed by the apostles (Acts 2:43). To the uninformed converts, what they were witnessing were signs of the kingdom. The elect, however, were instructed; and their instruction found permanent lodgment.

Peter continued to preach to the Jews. He began with a great public miracle, and the Jews admitted that a notable miracle had been done. Like the gift of languages (not tongues) at Pentecost, the miracle provided an audience for a Divine proclamation to the people of Israel. Scripture says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16 NASB). In Acts 2, we have a definition of the kingdom. As to result, it will bring the restitution of all things. As to time, it shall come when God shall send Jesus Christ back from His present session in Heaven. Its acceptance will be by the repentance and conversion of the remnant of Jews and a multitude of non-Jews from every nation (Rev. 7).

The great miracles of Acts were a foretaste of the kingdom to come. The miracles of this age are not great exhibitions of Divine power—"signs" and "wonders" to compel belief. The Jews seek after signs; Greeks, wisdom. When miracles take place during the present era of the church, they are veiled by the providential devices of God, thus permitting the willful skeptic to attribute the miracle to causes which are secondary. These secondary causes often make it difficult for the believer to prove its supernatural character. Trying to explain the unexplainable, religionists make fools of themselves; but they deceive many by their religiosity.

What Is The Kingdom? -- Part 3

W.E. Best

It is a sad fact that many religionists and some Christians have assigned to themselves what belongs to a future age—the kingdom. Christians have the earnest of the Spirit. Subsequent to his reference to their election before the foundation of the world, Paul told the Ephesians that they were predestined to adoption as sons, redeemed by Christ's blood, and all of that with a view to the fullness of the times (Eph. 1:4-9). All of this was "with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:10-12 NASB). What a blessing! We have come all the way from being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to hope in Christ in time that will be consummated in eternity.

Hope is based on the past, present, and future. It is based on the past, because its foundation is in the eternal covenant of God's grace (Heb. 13:20, 21). In Titus 2:11-15, Paul made a theological statement to support the practical exhortations given in Titus 2:1-10. If Titus should despair of the creation character, he should remember his own past experience. This is a great lesson for Christians in every age. Abraham believed in hope (Rom. 4:18), and so does his spiritual seed (Rom. 8:24, 25). Paul said, "...hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees?" (Rom. 8:24 NASB).

Hope is based on the present, because this hope is confirmed by Jesus Christ. From our point of view, there was a time when we were without hope, before we were regenerated. Paul said, "Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by the so-called Circumcision, which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity" (Eph. 2:11-16 NASB).

Hope is based on the future, because the eye of faith must look to the kingdom for its realization. Christ is called "our hope." Paul addressed his first letter to Timothy by saying, "PAUL, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope" (I Tim. 1:1 NASB). The first advent of Christ brought saving grace, and the second advent perfects it. The first advent brought the earnest of redemption in humiliation, and the second advent completes it in glory.

Hope is both entertained and expressed in the absence of the Redeemer. In Romans 8:24, Paul said, “For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees?” (NASB). The apostle also said, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, “...knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; ...how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come” (I Thess. 1:4, 9, 10 NASB).

We should be able to give a defense for our hope. “But sanctify [set apart] Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (I Peter 3:15 NASB). Your defense should consist of the following: (1) an active faith that grows (II Thess. 1:3a), (2) a self-sacrificing love (II Thess. 1:3b), and (3) a patient endurance (II Thess. 1:4, 5). This defense is not a negative, passive acquiescence to a question that might be asked. Hope is something that is tremendous. Paul said, “Knowing brethren beloved by God, His choice of you...and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven” (I Thess. 1:4, 9, 10 NASB). Always be ready to give a defense of what God has done for you.

Christianity is essentially a life of hope, because it is founded on the living hope. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Pet. 1:3-5 NASB).

The church (assembly) of Matthew 16:18 is not the kingdom of verse 19. Kingdom can never be a synonym for church (assembly). The Greek word for church (assembly) is *ekklesia* which comes from *ek*, a preposition meaning out or out from, and *kaleo*, which means to call or summon. When you join the two you have a compound verb *ekkaleo*, and the noun *ekklesia* is derived from the compound verb. What kind of assembly was it for which Christ died—universal or local? If He died for the local, He died for some who were reprobates, such as Judas and Simon Magus. If He died for the reprobates, He died in vain. If He died in vain, what assurance do we have that God will finish what He started? Paul said, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6 NASB). Every person given by the Father to the Son will be given the glory that the Father gave to the Son to give to the elect (John 17:2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14, 22, 24).

The assembly is present because Christ is building her. Christ said, “I will build (*oikodomeso*, progressive future active indicative first person singular of *oikodomeo*, to build) My church [assembly]” (Matt. 16:18). The assembly is not the kingdom, but we do have the relation of the assembly to the kingdom. The most common interpretation either read or heard today is that the church (assembly) of verse 18 is the kingdom of verse 19. The natural conclusion of such argument would be that the keys are for the church/kingdom. The following are some quotes on this passage by different scholars—

1. Albert Barnes: “The kingdom of heaven here means, doubtless, the church on earth...” (Matthew and Mark—page 71).
2. W. A. Criswell: “The church, inspired and God-breathed, carries the keys...The keys represent the purpose of administration” (Matthew—page 101).
3. Tony Evans: “God gave the church so much power that what she does on earth is approved by God in heaven” (Television statement; Graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary).
4. Walvoord & Zuck: “A key was a sign of authority, for a trusted steward kept the keys of his master’s possessions and dispensed them accordingly...Peter was told he would possess the keys and be able to bind and loose people. Peter was to implement as he received instruction from heaven, for the binding and loosing occurred there first” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary—page 58).
5. William Hendriksen: “The expression ‘my church’ refers, of course, to the church universal, here especially to the entire ‘body of Christ’ or ‘sum-total’ of all believers in its New Testament manifestation, wherever it is truly represented on earth.... The one who has the keys of the Kingdom of heaven determines who should be admitted and who must be refused admission” (Matthew—pages 648, 649).

Distinction between the assembly and the kingdom must be made in order to handle the Scriptures correctly. The Puritans in general made no distinction between Israel and the assembly. God’s choice of Israel was national. Within national Israel, God had a remnant according to the election of grace. (Study Deut. 7; Rom. 9:1-8; 11:1-8.) Before Christ turned from the Jews, the chosen to receive grace and be a part of the assembly were called out from national Israel. This means the Christian community in the midst of national Israel must not be confused with the synagogue, the Jewish community. In the transitional period, it is interesting to note that the Greek word for synagogue is used in referring to a Christian assembly in James 2:2, II Thessalonians 2:1 and Hebrews 10:25. Therefore, the assembly is not like wheat growing up together with tares. However, the assembly consists of those who have been called out of the world of tares, and she is to be separated from the tares. Therefore, the early assembly was growing in a twofold way: (1) numerically and (2) doctrinally.

Christ exposed the pharisaism of the Jews at the close of His public ministry. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see me until you say, BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!” (Matt. 23:37-39 NASB). Jesus Christ came at His first advent to start building a habitation for God. This habitation is the assembly of the living Christ who is the pillar and foundation of the truth which will accomplish its mission.

The subject of the keys has been one of great debate. However, since language means something, the keys are associated with the kingdom and not with the assembly. Furthermore, the equal authority on earth and in heaven should say something to us. The Record of all records says, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19 NASB Update).

The idea of a present kingdom and authority exercised by men on earth is not too far from Roman Catholic teaching. The equal authority in heaven and on earth means there is perfect identity between human and Divine authority and judgment. However, perfect identity between human and Divine authority and judgment is impossible in imperfect Christians. (Study carefully Romans 7, 8, 12-15; Philipians 3:12-14; I John 1:5-2:2.)

At this point of our study, it is imperative to take a close look at the Model Prayer (not the Lord's Prayer of John 17) of Matthew 6:5-15. There are three petitions in this prayer that must be recognized: (1) the revelation of the Father's character and attributes, (2) the kingdom's association with the Son of God, and (3) the will of God being done on earth as well as heaven when the Holy Spirit is poured out on the assembly Christ is building.

"Thy kingdom come" is a prayer that one distinctive kingdom shall come, not two or more, not that one may be within another, or not that one may come in different stages. "Thy kingdom come" cannot be prayed by one who is already in the kingdom, because the language points to the future. The kingdom is distinctively eschatological. Apart from the prophecies of the Old Testament, there would not have been any need for this petition: "Pray...Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9-10 NASB). The disciples would not have been taught the mysteries of the kingdom. The kingdom is the Father's to give, not ours to help bring into existence. It will come when Jesus Christ comes as King of kings and Lord of lords—the appearing of Christ and His kingdom (II Tim. 4:1). If the kingdom is already here, Paul's statement on hope is unwarranted. "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees?" (Rom. 8:24 NASB).

What Is The Kingdom? -- Part 4

W.E. Best

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church [assembly]; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:18-19 NASB Update).

The reason religionists dislike controversy is because Christianity is controversial. Therefore, the gospel of Christ is more than the gospel of possibility; it is the gospel of certainty. The sinner does not vote Jesus Christ into the office of Savior by his so-called acceptance of the gospel. Arminian theology teaches that Christ saves only those who open their hearts and let Christ enter. The Greek verb *sodzo*, when used in connection with those elected (chosen) by God the Father, has the following threefold meaning: (1) Salvation is being saved from the penalty of sin by being crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20; I Pet. 1:18, 19). (2) Preservation in Christ is for the work to which the chosen ones have been appointed (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12-18). (3) The final deliverance of salvation has been assured for the elect (I Pet. 1:3-5; II Tim. 4:1-8; 16-18). There is no doubt that Paul had this threefold deliverance in mind when he said to the Corinthians, “For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope, And He will yet deliver us” (II Cor. 1:8-10 NASB).

The death of Jesus Christ at Calvary has not provided a redemption which actually accomplishes less than it purposed. Therefore, the God of the Bible could not purpose salvation for every person, because He did not choose every person to be saved. What value is there in the blood of Christ if Christ condemns some for whom He died? Would a person pay down a valuable sum of money for that which he had no assurance he could ever eventually possess?

Where there is no conviction of sin, the man of God should refrain from giving the good news. If you are talking to someone and there is no conviction of sin, do not continue to talk to him about the wonderful things of Calvary. Solomon said, “A sated [to satisfy fully; to surfeit or glut] man loathes honey, But to a famished man any bitter thing is sweet” (Prov. 27:7 NASB). A sated man’s reply may be something like this: “I have never killed anyone or robbed a bank.” The Law must be preached to sinners. Paul said, “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, YOU SHALL NOT COVET. But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment

came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful” (Rom. 7:7-13 NASB). The bitter message test is to see who are the hungry, and the honey is for the hungry. The bitter part of Peter’s message on the day of Pentecost was given first (Acts 2:22, 23), and the sweet portion of his message was given last (Acts 2:24-36).

Every one of the Ten Commandments was broken before they were ever given in the Word of God. In one act of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden, his disobedience broke every one of the Ten Commandments. (1) He chose a false god. (2) He desired the forbidden by making a forbidden god out of his belly by eating the forbidden fruit. (3) He took the Lord’s name in vain when he failed to believe God’s warning. (4) Adam broke the sinless rest in which he had been placed. (5) He dishonored his Creator Father. (6) Murder was committed when Adam brought death to himself and to his posterity. (7) Spiritual adultery was committed when Adam preferred the creature above the Creator. (8) Adam was guilty of stealing when he took that to which he had no right. (9) In accepting the Devil’s false witness, Adam broke the ninth commandment (don’t steal). (10) This commandment was broken when Adam coveted that which God had not given him.

Christ did not preach terror to the woman who washed His feet with her tears (Luke 7:37-39), to the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-31), or to Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10). Paul did not preach terror to Lydia whose heart the Lord opened to pay close attention to Paul’s message (Acts 16:14, 15) or to the jailer (Acts 16:31-40).

Nothing makes a person more unpopular than for the man of God to insist on a definition of terms. Religionists are horrified by the use of theological terms. For example, when an Arminian was asked to explain that “simple faith” is the gift of God, Samuel Fisk said, “It is true in one sense that faith is the gift of God, but it is God’s gift to all who want it, to all who are willing to use it...It is not given all, because all will not avail themselves of it, will not yield to the moving of the Spirit (Holy), and will not let the regenerating power of God work within them.”—Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom, Loizeaux Brothers, page 31

The assembly is not the kingdom, but we have the relation of the assembly to the kingdom (Matt. 16:18, 19, 27, 28; 17:1-13). The most common interpretation read or heard is that the church (assembly) of Matthew 16:18 is the kingdom of God on earth in verse 19.

The following twelve things must be considered by every sincere student of the Scriptures:

1. Kingdom is not a synonym for assembly (church).
2. The assembly (church) is present and the kingdom is future.
3. Believers are subjects of the assembly (church), but they are heirs of the kingdom.
4. Believers are “in” the assembly, but they are called “unto” the kingdom.
5. The kingdom will not come until the assembly is complete and perfected.
6. Flesh and blood are in the assembly now, but they cannot inherit the kingdom.
7. Elders are appointed for the assembly’s edification, but they are not appointed to build up the kingdom.
8. The hope of the saints is the reign of Christ in the kingdom, but not in the assembly (church).
9. If the assembly (church) was the kingdom, saints would be reigning now.
10. The assembly (church) includes only redeemed mankind, but the kingdom includes heavenly, unredeemed beings and earthly, redeemed beings.
11. Christ is the Head of the assembly, but He will be King of the Kingdom.
12. The assembly is being built upon the foundation of Christ between the two advents of Christ, but the kingdom will be set up by Christ at His second advent. Therefore, one is a process, and the other is an act.

The keys are associated with the kingdom and not with the assembly. That is why the keys are mentioned in Matthew 16, but they are not mentioned in Matthew 18. It is important to observe that the keys restrict the authority. Even in the purest period of the local aspect of the assembly’s history, it had a mixture of people who did not have the Spirit of God. There was a Judas among the apostles, a Simon Magus among the first converts, and a Demas and Diotrefes among the first servants. The only way the local aspect of the assembly could be sure of heaven’s approval was when there was agreement in the spirit of prayer. “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst” (Matt. 18:19, 20 NASB).

Another great difference between the assembly and kingdom is the fact that no prayer and the condition of agreement will be needed in the kingdom. However, they both are needed in our imperfect state. It takes both the standard of heaven and the spirit of prayer to keep us from acting arbitrarily in our imperfect condition. Here is another wonderful aspect of hope that will not disappoint us. It will be impossible for the completed and perfected assembly to act arbitrarily in the kingdom.

The keys of Matthew 16:19 are associated with the kingdom and not with the assembly. There have been many debates over the Greek word *kleis*, which is used six times in the New Testament—Matthew 16:19; Luke 11:52; Revelation 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; and 20:1. The most common interpretation in Protestantism is that the keys were given to Peter to open the door of the gospel to the Jews in Acts 2 and the Gentiles in Acts 10. It is also stated, “Peter exercised this authority by being the first to preach Christ to Jews and

Gentiles and admit them to the kingdom of heaven.” However, the equal authority on earth and in heaven should call for a question from the discerning mind. This means there is perfect identity between human and Divine authority and judgment. Such authority and judgment is impossible in imperfect Christians.

The idea of a present kingdom and authority by imperfect Christians on earth ignores the plain teaching of Scripture. No keys are committed to the assembly for use in the age of grace. The assembly is built by Christ, not with keys by men. If believers are in the church/kingdom by the authority of the keys, how can they say, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22 NASB). What about the language of the following Scriptures? Paul said, “Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (I Thess. 2:8-12 NASB). James said, “Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5 NASB).

The idea that Christians already possess the kingdom has led to all kinds of heresies and extravagant claims of authority and fanaticism. Romanism, Mormonism, and many in Protestantism make unscriptural claims concerning both the keys and kingdom. The language is the same in both Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 concerning the binding and loosing, but the time and persons executing the authority are different. In the former, it is the kingdom by the perfected assembly; in the latter, it is in time by imperfect saints. The standard is the same in both passages, but the executors are different. The binding and loosing is the exercise of judgment in the realm of conduct.

It is not unusual for Scripture on behalf of believers to assert ownership regarding certain spiritual blessings before they are possessed in Christian experience. Ownership is legally certain although the experience of possession may be future—de jure (by right; according to law) before de facto (in fact; in reality—actually existing). Therefore, Paul could say, “For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13, 14 NASB).

*Confusion of the different aspects of Christ's
Rule leads to serious consequences*

1. It makes the present age the period of the kingdom.
2. It has the assembly in her present imperfect state “thinking” she is performing things which cannot be done until the assembly is perfected.
3. It terminates the covenanted purpose of Israel.
4. It makes the assembly age the final period of historical redemption.
5. It seats mortal and sinful men on the throne with the risen and glorified Christ.
6. It confuses being ruled over now in time and ruling with Christ in the kingdom.
7. Its system of philosophy cannot distinguish between imperfection and perfection—mortality and immortality.

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