Proclaiming the Reign of Jesus Christ

Dub McClish

Introduction

> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all things in subjection under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death (1 Cor. 15:22–26).[1]

Clearly, Paul here declares that Christ is reigning and that His reign will continue as long as death holds its sway over mankind. To speak of the reign of Christ is to imply the fact that He is a King. To speak of His Kingship is to imply His kingdom, which fact is also set forth in the passage just noted.

It is likely no exaggeration to say that ninety-five percent of the so-called "believing world" (Protestant Christendom) is convinced and militantly teaches that the kingdom of Christ has not yet been established and therefore that Christ is not yet reigning as King (except perhaps in some very limited sense). This system of theology is generally referred to as "premillennialism," which may be sub-divided as follows:

1. Historic or classic premillennialism is usually credited to Papias in the early second century AD, whose fanciful theories were widely denounced by most of his contemporaries.
2. Dispensational premillennialism (aka "dispensationalism") has revived the old future-kingdom errors in modern times with several new twists. It was fathered by J. N. Darby in 1830 in England and popularized by C.I. Scofield by means of his dispensational interpretations included in the widely circulated KJV "Scofield Bible." Dispensationalism is decidedly the version of premillennialism that has engulfed modern Protestantism. Adherents of this theological framework for the Bible remind us of the advocates of evolution in at least one respect: The Protestant denominations have as eagerly (and gullibly!) swallowed premillennialism as the scientific community has swallowed the evolutionary hypothesis—and with as little evidence!

The church of the Lord is practically the only religious body that has not been overwhelmed by this heretical dogma. Except for rare exceptions, churches of Christ have consistently been (and still are) composed of those who believe and teach exactly what Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 15:22–26 (and which the Bible in its entirety likewise teaches) concerning the reign and kingdom of Christ.[2]

A more significant concept than that of the reign and kingdom of Christ can hardly be conceived. It has to do with the meaning of the prophetic message, the veracity of God as He spoke through the prophets, the omniscience and foreknowledge of God, that which constitutes the kingdom of God and Christ, who the people of God are, yea, the entire scheme of redemption. Premillennialism alters the Bible's teaching concerning the reign and kingdom of Christ basically, radically, and damnably. It demotes the Son of God from His heavenly throne in His eternal kingdom and gives Him a mere throne of clay for only one thousand years on earth. It is not merely an innocent variant opinion concerning the King and His Kingdom. It is not merely an offbeat interpretation of a few passages of Scripture. Rather, it is (as indicated above) a full-blown **system of theology and hermeneutics** that colors and perverts the entire thrust of the Biblical message.

The Premillennial Program of the Reign and Kingdom of Christ

The Meaning of *Premillennialism*

The definition of the word *premillennial* reveals the heart of the system's theology. *Millennial* refers to a period of one thousand years. Premillennialists lift it from the extremely figurative context of Revelation 20:1–9. They adamantly insist that the thousand-year reign of Christ (vv. 4, 6) refers to a literal political kingdom upon the earth. **Pre** is in reference to the Lord's second coming, which they teach will occur before the millennial reign begins and which will usher in His alleged literal, earthly reign. The entire system is based upon this fundamental concept of the reign and kingdom of Christ. It is the "tail" that wags their theological "dog" in its entireity.

We cannot overemphasize the fact that premillennialism is inseparably tied to and founded upon Revelation 20:4, 6; it has not even the first faint hint of a semblance

of a suggestion in Scripture without this passage because the Bible nowhere else mentions a one-thousand-year reign of Christ. Of course, a Truth need not be mentioned more than once in the Bible for it to be so. However, one must supply proof beyond question that one comprehends the meaning of such singular statements, **especially if he chooses one of these upon which to base a theological system**, as in this instance.

At least three guiding hermeneutical principles are in order before settling on an adamant interpretation of any statement of Scripture, but especially of one that stands alone:

1. If it is in a context of figurative language, special caution is warranted.
2. If it is in a context of figurative language, passages on related subjects which are couched in literal language must dictate its meaning, rather than vice versa.
3. Whether in a literal or figurative context, it must not be interpreted so as to contradict any other Bible passage that is unmistakable in its meaning.

Premillennialism utterly fails on all counts:

1. Premillennialists observe no caution at all relating to the overall figurative nature of Revelation 20:1–9, nor of the entire book of Revelation.
2. They reverse the reliable hermeneutical rule by which figurative language must always be governed by literal statements. They take a figurative time period within a context full of figures in a book written in signs and symbols (e.g., Rev. 1:1) and force every plain and literal statement in the Bible that pertains to the kingdom and reign of Christ to conform to it.
3. Their literal interpretation of the thousand-year reign (in a markedly figurative context) places it in hopeless and irretrievable conflict with many plain and clear Biblical statements concerning Christ's reign and kingdom.

The Premillennial Program

Modern premillennial devotees are not at all united when it comes to many of the details of their program, but the following scheme is generally held by them:

1. God promised to give a certain geographical territory to Abraham and his descendants, which they allege, had not been fulfilled before the birth of Jesus.

2. God had also promised David that He would set his son upon a throne in a triumphant kingdom. Premillennialists interpret this in terms of an earthly kingdom, even as the Jews erroneously did in the first century.
3. When the Christ came, He intended to establish this political kingdom through which He would fulfill the land promise to the Jews.
4. However, instead of embracing Jesus as their king, the Jews rejected His kingdom aspirations and crucified Him, thus preventing Him from fulfilling God's promises, prophecies, and plans.
5. God was "surprised" and momentarily caught off-guard, not anticipating the Jews' rejection of His Son which thwarted His kingdom plans. As an emergency measure of Divine afterthought, God decided to postpone His original kingdom plans. Instead, He established the church, which would serve as a substitute for the literal/fleshly earthly millennial kingdom which Christ will establish when He comes again.
6. Before He comes to establish His earthly kingdom He will come secretly, at which time all the righteous dead will be raised (the "first resurrection"in their view) and they, along with the righteous ones then living, will be caught up in the air for a seven-year period of the "rapture." The last half of the "rapture" will be one of "great tribulation" on the earth.
7. At the end of the "rapture" Christ will visibly descend with His saints, establish His kingdom in Jerusalem, and bring all the Jews back to Canaan of old to fulfill the land promise to Israel He will sit on David's literal throne, revive the law of Moses (the temple will be rebuilt, the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system will be reinstated), and He will reign over a world-dominating Jewish kingdom for one thousand years.
8. At the end of the one thousand years (some aver at the beginning), a war that will end all wars will occur. Satan will marshal the armies of all the evil nations to destroy the Kingdom of Christ in carnal warfare (a literal "battle of Armageddon"), but Satan will be utterly defeated.
9. Following the battle of Armageddon, the unrighteous dead will be raised (the "second resurrection") and the final judgment will occur.

While the program is false in every fundamental part, the crux of it is its misconception of the reign and kingdom of Christ. If we can demonstrate that premillennialists pervert the teaching of the Bible concerning these fundamental doctrines (as did the first-century Jews), we shall have refuted the entire system. Said demonstration will thus be the burden of the material that follows.

Principal Prophecies of the Reign and Kingdom of Christ

Nathan's Prophecy of the Reign and Kingdom of One of the Seed of David

The Jews were correct in their expectations of a Messianic son of David Who would be enthroned and given a kingdom. Several such prophecies were uttered, some from the pen of David himself (e.g., Psa. 18:50; 89:28–38; 132:11; et al.); others are scattered over several centuries from various prophets. There is none more comprehensive and emphatic than the one spoken by Nathan to David concerning the future of His house, kingdom, and throne:

> When thy days are fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, that shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and **I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever**. I will be his father, and he shall be my son: if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; but my lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thy house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee: **thy throne shall be established for ever**. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David (2 Sam. 7:12–17, emp. DM).

Note the following major features:

1. At some unspecified time after David's death God would establish a kingdom for one of his heirs.
2. This "son of David" would "build a house" for God and He would establish the throne of this descendant of David forever.
3. God would be to this new king a Father, and the new king would be His Son.
4. If He should sin, God would chasten him.
5. God would not withdraw His favor from this son of David as He had done from Saul when he proved himself unworthy.
6. The promise that the house, kingdom, and throne of the new king would be established forever is repeated.

This passage cannot refer merely to Solomon, as some aver. It is doubtful that it even partly refers to Solomon and partly to another son of David, as others assert. Based on the following considerations, it applies singularly to someone **besides** Solomon:

1. Solomon was enthroned **before** David died (1 Kin. 1–2:10).
2. While Solomon built the temple and sat on David's throne, and subsequent heirs of David continued on the Jewish throne, neither of these were "forever." (Solomon

reigned for only 40 years and his nineteen successors to David's throne for only about four centuries thereafter.)

3. Jehovah never said to Solomon, "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son."
4. This son of David would be **capable** of sin, but not necessarily a sinner. There was no "if" concerning the many sins of Solomon!
5. God withdrew His favor from Solomon when he descended into debauchery and idolatry (1 Kin. 11:1–36), but He would not withdraw His favor from the king in this prophecy.

Solomon **could not** have been the king, nor his domain—as glorious, rich, and powerful as it was—the kingdom of which Nathan spoke.

Isaiah's Davidic Throne Prophecy

In the seventh century B.C. Isaiah foretold one who was to eventually govern from David's throne in a never-ending kingdom.

> For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, 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 justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6–7; cf. 16:5; emp. DM).

The notable details of this prophecy are as follows:

1. A male child would be born who would possess the incomparable traits and fulfill the important functions about to be stated (this child had already been prophesied as the virgin-born Immanuel, meaning "God with us" [Isa. 7:14]).
2. He would be given rule, dominion, and power of government.
3. He would be called by extraordinary and superlative names—some of which belong only to Deity.
4. He would reign from the throne of David over an unending kingdom.
5. His kingdom would be characterized by justice and righteousness.
6. The Lord would bring these events to pass without fail.

The one described (and the kingdom over which he would reign) was obviously unlike any of the ten Davidic monarchs that had thus far occupied the throne, nor would it be possible for the details of this prophecy to be fulfilled **by any mere man or any earthly political kingdom**.

While the Jews correctly perceived the prophecies of both Nathan and Isaiah to be Messianic, they were incorrect in superimposing an earthly, political interpretation and application upon them, as the next prophecy demonstrates.

Jeremiah's Prophecy Concerning Coniah

In pronouncing the certain doom of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah uttered the following curse concerning Coniah, the Davidic king of Judah at the time of Babylon's conquest of Jerusalem:

> Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel? Is he a vessel wherein none delighteth? Wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah, write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; **for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah** (Jer. 22:28–30, emp. DM).

This prophecy concerns David's throne, but instead of speaking of **who will sit upon it**, it identifies who **will not sit upon it!** Note the following:

1. Coniah (aka Jeconiah, Jehoiachin), a descendant of David, was then reigning, but had been rejected by Jehovah.
2. He was going to be cast out and taken into captivity in Babylon with the fall of Jerusalem.
3. He would be childless. Coniah had several sons (2 Chr. 3:17–18), **but concerning an heir on the throne of David**, he would be childless—none of his sons would succeed him.
4. Not only so, but thenceforth there would never be any of his (thus David's) seed or descendants who would sit upon David's throne and rule in Judah.

Thus Jeremiah's prophecy (c. 600 B.C.) signaled **the absolute end** of the earthly Davidic throne and kingdom.

Zechariah's Prophecy Concerning the Priest/King

Another significant and remarkable prophecy concerning one who was to be enthroned was uttered by Zechariah, who prophesied during the building of Zerubbabel's temple after the return from captivity:

> Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying, Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place; and he shall build the temple of Jehovah; even he shall build the temple of Jehovah; and he shall bear the glory, **and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne**; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both (Zec. 6:12–13, emp. DM).

Several statements in this prophecy are worthy of emphasis:

1. It concerns one named the "Branch" who would "grow up out of his place." Some 250 years earlier Isaiah had foretold the coming of this "Branch" who would proceed from the stem and root of Jesse (the father of David) (Isa. 11:1). Thus, the place from which this branch would grow would be of Davidic stock.
2. The Branch of David would build the temple of the Lord at some future time. This temple would obviously be in contrast to Zerubbabel's, already under construction in their presence. It would be one built solely by the Branch and for which He would therefore receive all of the glory.
3. This descendant of David would be given a throne on which he would sit and from which he would reign.
4. He would not only be a king, but a priest, performing both functions and occupying both roles simultaneously.
5. There would be harmony, peace, oneness between Jehovah and the Branch.

The principal feature which Zechariah contributes to the "throne prophecies" is that the king thus enthroned would at the same time also be a priest.

Daniel's Kingdom Prophecies

Like Zechariah, Daniel did not explicitly mention the throne of David in his kingdom prophecies. However, his prophecies certainly imply the Davidic throne in that kingdom.

> And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.… I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an ever-lasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; 7:13–14).

An analysis of these prophetic statements reveals the following emphases:

1. The time of the fulfillment of this prophecy was to be "in the days of those kings" (i.e., of the kingdom described in the previous verses [vv. 40–43]), a reference to the Roman Empire and its emperors.
2. God would set up a kingdom, unlike those of the world which prevail for a while and then are swallowed up by another. This kingdom would be indestructible. Rather

than being conquered and supplanted by its enemies it would destroy and consume all others and thereby be endlessly perpetuated.

3. In his prophetic vision Daniel saw one with a human form who passed through the clouds and came into the presence of God.
4. God gave him glory and authority (thus, by implication, the throne) to rule in His universal, everlasting kingdom, prophesied in 2:44.

Daniel was speaking of the same everlasting kingdom prophesied by Nathan and Isaiah (surely none would argue that God prophesied more than one!). Both Nathan and Isaiah identify the throne of David with that kingdom and the descendant of David as its occupant. Thus, indirectly, Daniel prophesied concerning the reign of a king upon the throne of David.

A Summary of These Prophecies

Before examining the fulfillment of these prophecies, note their summation:

1. God would set up an indestructible kingdom, temple, house through a son or descendant of David.
2. This son of David would also be called "Son of God."
3. This son of David/God would reign on the throne of David, which would likewise be established forever and would be in the eternal kingdom.
4. The one who would reign from David's throne would be born of a virgin, be named "Immanuel," and would be called by names reserved for Deity.
5. The king upon David's throne in the everlasting kingdom would simultaneously be a priest.
6. The eternal kingdom would be established after David had died, in the days of the Roman Empire.
7. The eternal kingdom would not have its seat in old Jerusalem because no Davidic king would be allowed to reign there after the time of Coniah.
8. The enthronement, empowerment, and coronation of the son of David over the eternal kingdom would not be on earth, but in Heaven before the throne of God.

We are now ready to turn our attention to the fulfillment of these striking oracles.

The Fulfillment of the Prophecies of the Davidic Heir and His Eternal Kingdom

The New Testament reveals beyond any doubt that all the prophecies relating to the throne of David and the everlasting kingdom pertaining to it were singularly and

specifically fulfilled in the life and work of our Lord Jesus, the Christ of God. The only ground upon which to question or deny this affirmation is to deny the veracity and integrity of the New Testament authors, which is tantamount to a rejection of their inspiration. It is now appropriate to examine the evidence that Jesus fulfilled all the throne and kingdom prophecies.

Jesus Was the Son of David

The first words of the New Testament positively identify the lineage of Jesus: "The book of the generation of **Jesus Christ, the son of David**, the son of Abraham" (Mat. 1:1; cf. Luke 3:31–32; emp. DM). Although the Jews misinterpreted the **nature** of the Messiah and His kingdom in the Old Testament prophets, they **correctly understood** that He would be a descendant of David. On his final visit to Jerusalem Jesus asked the Pharisees whose son the Christ would be, and they answered immediately, "The son of David" (Mat. 22:42). When Jesus began to demonstrate His power and wisdom, some conjectured that He could be the promised "son of David," thus the Messiah (Mat. 12:23). Others positively identified Him as such, including blind men in Capernaum and Jericho (9:27; 20:30–31), the "Canaanitish" mother (15:22), and the multitude that acclaimed His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:9). Peter had the Messiah's Davidic ancestry in view when on Pentecost he identified Christ as "the fruit of his [i.e., David's] loins" (Acts 2:29–31). Paul pointedly identified Christ as "the Son of God" "who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:2–4; 2 Tim. 2:8).

Jesus Was Also the Son of God

Jesus was not only the son of David, but He was also the Son of God in a sense that applies to none other. Paul has already introduced us to this dual identity in Romans 1:2–4, just cited. When Jesus quizzed the Pharisees about whose son the Christ was (and they correctly answered, "The son of David" [Mat. 22:42]), He was attempting to help them see that the Christ was also the Son of God. Otherwise, David could not have called One Who would descend from him (i.e., David) "Lord" (vv. 43–45). When Gabriel announced to Mary the conception of Jesus in her womb, he identified Him as "the Son of the Most High" as well as having David as His father (Luke 1:31–32). In the Christ-exalting first chapter of Hebrews, the writer quoted the prophecy of Nathan con-

cerning David's son as fulfilled in Christ: "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son" (Heb. 1:5b; 2 Sam. 7:14).

The means by which He, as Deity, was made in the likeness and fashion of men, was through His begettal by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. This was Gabriel's explanation to the troubled and incredulous Mary (Luke 1:32–35) and that of the unnamed angel to Joseph (Mat. 1:20–21). While Jesus had a fleshly mother, **His Father was Almighty God!** It is because of and by this begettal that the title, "the only begotten of the Father," belongs to Jesus of Nazareth alone (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; et al.). Matthew connects this spectacular event to Isaiah's prophecy of a virgin who would give birth to a son (7:14). So, in Jesus we have not only the *son of David*, but also the *Son of God*—the very qualifications specified in the prophets for Him Who would be the heir to David's throne and to a never-ending kingdom. As Isaiah prophesied, the names of Deity were applied to Him and frequently so (Mat. 1:23; 8:29; 22:43; Luke 4:12; John 1:1; 12:45; 20:28; Phi. 2:6; 1 Tim. 6:14–15; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8; et al.).

God the Father Placed His Son, Jesus, upon the Throne of David

The language of Gabriel to Mary is explicit:

> And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt 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** (Luke 1:31–32; emp. DM).

This prophecy is an unmistakable declaration that Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, was the One of whom Nathan, Isaiah, and Zechariah all prophesied when they foretold a new occupant for the throne of David. God's throne promise to David and his son (2 Sam. 7:12–16) and the repetition of it by David (Psa. 132:11) were on the lips of Peter in his Pentecost sermon. Of David he said:

> Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left unto Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption (Acts 2:30–31).

Both Nathan and Isaiah emphasized the unending nature of the throne to be occupied by the son of David. The Hebrews writer quotes the Father as saying of His Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," thus declaring the fulfillment of this by our Lord (Heb. 1:8; cf. Psa. 45:6).

Was this to be David's literal throne on earth, as the Jews have believed for almost three centuries—and as premillennialism demands? A few words are in order concerning the ultimate ownership and identity of David's throne. The same throne that is referred to in the Old Testament as the "throne of the kingdom," is also called "Solomon's throne" and "David's throne" (1 Kin. 1:46–48). It is likely best known as the "throne of David" (and is so identified) because he was the father of the line of kings to whom God gave it and with whom it was most closely and consistently associated. It was "the throne of the kingdom" because it pertained to God's theocratic nation of Israel. It was "Solomon's throne "only because he occupied it and only as long as he occupied it. However, it is also called "the throne of the Lord" (1 Chr. 29:23). The throne upon which David and his successors reigned was given to him by God; it ultimately belonged to God because it was His alone to give or withhold. Thus, the literal throne of God, of David, and of David's **immediate** son (Solomon) were all one throne in the fleshly kingdom of Israel.

The prophecies concerning the enthronement of David's **distant** son at least hinted that the throne (even as the kingdom pertaining to it) would not be earthly or material as the old throne was. (It would endure unendingly, an impossible quality for anything material or temporal. Bear in mind also that Jeremiah had announced six centuries before Christ that there would never be another Davidic occupant of the earthly throne in Judah.) Peter's Pentecost statements that Christ fulfilled those prophecies when He was raised from the dead, ascended into Heaven, and was enthroned at God's right hand (Acts 2:30–36; cf. Dan. 7:13–14) demand the following conclusions:

1. The throne upon which Christ has been resurrected and exalted to sit is in Heaven, not upon the earth.
2. Since Jesus' enthronement fulfilled the prophetic promises that a son of David would be placed upon David's throne, the throne in Heaven upon which Christ was placed when He ascended to the Father is also the throne of David.
3. David's old temporal, material throne was but the type; the heavenly, spiritual throne upon which Christ was placed when He ascended to the Father is the anti-type.
4. The throne of God, the throne of Christ, and the throne of David are all one and the same in the anti-type, even as they were in the type.

5. There will be no future enthronement of Christ upon a temporal, material throne of David upon the earth.
6. Christ is now seated on the only throne ever promised to Him and that He will ever receive.

Hebrews 1:3 declares that Jesus was enthroned after He had offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin. (It was only forty days after the Lord had given Himself up to be nailed to the cross as the sacrificial Lamb of God that He ascended to the Father [Acts 1:3]). Hebrews 1:3 agrees perfectly with what Daniel saw in his prophetic night vision and with what Peter declared on Pentecost.

Further, the throne prophecy of Zechariah concerning the"Branch" stated that He would **simultaneously** be a Priest and a King. Therefore, when and where He was given His **priestly** role is when and where He was given David's kingdom throne. Just as He was to be enthroned as a **King** eternally, so also, He was to be a **Priest** forever (Heb. 7:20–24; cf. Psa. 110:4). However, **He could not be a priest on earth at all**, because He was of the tribe of Judah, rather than of Levi (Heb. 8:4; 7:14 [note the inspired writer's bold use of Scriptural silence in his argument here!]). He offered His own blood as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin on the cross and presented this all-sufficient offering to His Father when He ascended (Heb. 9:24–26). It was, upon receiving that sacrifice, that God the Father placed Him as a Priest upon a throne in Heaven: "but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet" (Heb. 10:12–13).

What conclusions can we draw from the foregoing?

1. Christ's reign as Priest began upon presentation of His sin offering to the Father.
2. His reign as Priest was/is in Heaven because He was not qualified to be such **upon the earth.**
3. His reign as Priest was to begin at the same time and be in the same place as His reign as King because He was to reign as both simultaneously.
4. Jesus was given the throne of His everlasting kingdom when He ascended to Heaven.
5. **Since His reign as Priest could not be on earth, neither could His reign as King be on earth!**

No wonder Paul described the Christ as **now reigning** (1 Cor. 15:25–26)!

The Kingdom Promised to Christ is Spiritual in Nature

The prophets uniformly foresaw the establishment of a never-ending kingdom, often in the same prophetic announcement as that of David's "son" who would be given an atemporal throne. Obviously, the throne and the kingdom in these prophecies are concomitant with each other. As with the throne, so with the kingdom—when the former has been identified and located, likewise the latter will have been. The nature of the one is the nature of both. When the one began is when they both began. The one does not exist independent of the other. We have demonstrated that Christ, since His ascension, has been upon the throne foretold by the prophets. Thus, the kingdom they foresaw has been in existence since that time unless **the Christ is a king without a kingdom**! We have demonstrated that the throne is heavenly, non-material, and spiritual; so must the kingdom be. Such proof by implication is sufficient to convince those who handle aright the Word of Truth and who obey the strong voice of reason.

The fact that it was to be indestructible implies that it would not be physical or material in nature, because all material things sooner or later perish. However, the New Testament contains far more than mere hints about the nature of the kingdom. The most powerful proof is from the Lord's own description of His kingdom. When Jesus was on trial before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor asked Him if He were a king, to which He responded:

> Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee concerning me? …. My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:34, 36).

Here He tells Pilate (and all others who will listen) that **He will reign as a King over a kingdom, but that His kingdom will not be like the one Pilate serves.** That is, it would not be an earthly political realm with armed forces, the very kind of kingdom the Jews expected. This is also the sort of kingdom the premillennial devotees insist that the Lord will have in the literal millennial reign they envision. Obviously, they presume to know more about the nature of the kingdom of Christ than Christ does Himself!

From Jeremiah 22:28–30 we have already learned that the kingdom of the prophets would not have its seat in Judah (Jerusalem), the only place the earthly throne over all of Israel ever resided. Coniah was the last descendant of David who would ever oc-

cupy his throne **in that location**. **This prophecy had the effect of declaring that no descendant of David would ever reign again on a literal earthly throne!** This being so, if a son of David was to reign on his throne (as God said he would), that throne must be in Heaven—the spiritual realm—and the throne and kingdom He was to receive must therefore be spiritual/heavenly instead of material/earthly.

Furthermore, in Daniel's prophetic night vision, he saw the Christ **ascending into Heaven** to receive His kingdom, rather than **descending to the earth** to set up a political empire (Dan. 7:13–14). This gives additional emphasis to the fact that the nature of the kingdom was to be spiritual, rather than physical or material. Thus the concept of a literal earthly domain as the fulfillment of the Old Testament kingdom prophecies, whether it lasts one or one thousand years, contradicts what the prophets foretold and what the Lord Himself taught.

The Church of Christ Is the Eternal Kingdom of the Prophets

The church which Jesus promised to build and the eternal spiritual kingdom which the prophets foretold are one and the same institution. Notice the following proofs of this affirmation:

1. God, through Nathan, told David that his son, whose throne and kingdom would be established forever, would build a house for His name. Jesus, the son of David who was to be given David's throne and an everlasting kingdom (Luke 1:31–33), promised that He would build His church. After Peter boldly confessed the foundational, bedrock truth that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mat. 16:16), the Lord then praised his confession and said, "…upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (v. 18). This is the first time the word *church* appears in the New Testament, but the Lord did not leave us wondering what the church is. He immediately referred to it by a more familiar name—"the kingdom of heaven"—and promised Peter the "keys" to it (v. 19). The Lord did not build one thing and give Peter the keys to something different—they are one and the same.
2. The same pattern of identity is seen in Hebrews 12. The writer speaks of the church in verse 23 and then calls it "…a kingdom that cannot be shaken"—which they had **already** received (v. 28). Note here the unmistakable connection between the unshaka-

ble kingdom and Daniel's description of the kingdom "which shall never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44). Since the unshakable kingdom is the church (Heb. 12:28, then the eternal kingdom Daniel and the other prophets foresaw is therefore the church.

3. The Lord appointed a kingdom to His apostles in which He said they would "eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (Luke 22:29–30). However, when the apostles and other saints began to eat and drink at the Lord's table, it was in His **church** (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:17–29). Since Jesus promised that His table was to be in the kingdom, but it was (and is) in His church, either Christ made an egregious blunder, or **the kingdom and the church are the same**.
4. To the **church** in Colossae Paul wrote that God "…delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (1:13). Obviously, church membership and citizenship in the kingdom of Christ are equivalents. **The church and the kingdom are one**.

Therefore, the church that Jesus promised to build is the same as the kingdom that was "at hand," that was to "come with power" in the lifetime of the apostles, and that was described as everlasting by the prophets. The church is therefore that "house" of which Nathan spoke that the son of David was to build (cf. Isa. 2:2; 1 Tim. 3:15). Far from being a spur-of-the-moment substitute for God's failed kingdom plans when the Jews rejected the Christ, **the church is that prophesied kingdom**. Utterly contrary to premillennial dogma, the church is no mere Divine "afterthought," but it is at the very core of God's eternal plan for man's redemption (Eph. 3:10–11).

The Church/Kingdom Was Established on the Pentecost Following Jesus' Resurrection

It must follow that if we can learn when the church came into being, we can also learn when Christ was given the eternal throne and kingdom and vice versa.

We have demonstrated the fact that the church and the kingdom of the prophets are one and the same. The church (the prophetic kingdom) was established in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of the Christ, which fulfills the kingdom prophecies, as the following evidence shows:

1. "Jesus Christ, the son of David," was born of the virgin Mary at the right time to fulfill the time element relating to the kingdom prophecies. Nathan said his prophecy would come to pass when David's days had been fulfilled and when he slept the sleep of death with his fathers. David's remains had been resting in their Jerusalem tomb a full millennium when Jesus was born (cf. Acts 2:29). Daniel said that God would set up His indestructible kingdom in the days of the Roman Empire and its "kings." Rome ruled the world when Jesus was born (Luke 2:1).
2. John the Baptizer, Jesus Himself, and the apostles all preached, "…the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7)). Mark's description of Jesus' preaching is yet clearer: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). The meaning of this message was that the kingdom was nearby, it was time for the kingdom foretold by the prophets to come, and it soon would come.
3. The Lord was even more specific about when the kingdom would come. He said to the apostles, "Verily I say unto you, There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). Note first that Jesus promised that the kingdom prophecies would be fulfilled in that very generation (i.e., at least some of the apostles to whom He spoke would be alive to witness its inception). Note also that the kingdom would come "with power." If the kingdom has not yet come with power (every Orthodox Jew and every unorthodox premillennialist asserts that it has not!), then either (a) the Lord was a false prophet or (b) somewhere on earth at least one of the apostles is still alive! Since neither of these is true, the kingdom of the prophets, promised to the son of David, had to be (and was) established during the generation in which the apostles lived.
4. As already indicated, the kingdom was "at hand" from the days of John (Mat. 3:2), and it was to come "with power" in the lifetime of the apostles (Mark 9:1). The "power" is explained as follows: Jesus promised the apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit upon them when He departed from them and returned to the Father. The Spirit would come in mighty power, giving them supernatural abilities

(John 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:7–8, 13–14). Immediately before His ascension, He reminded them of this promise of power and told them how to be prepared for its reception: "And behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). This "power from on high" is more specifically identified as Holy Spirit baptism (v. 5) and "when the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (v. 8). The Lord ascended from their midst, as He had told them He would, and they waited in Jerusalem as He commanded them to for the power He had promised them (Luke 24:50–52; Acts 1:9, 12).

5. The events recorded in Acts 2 occurred in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection (v. 1). Of the original apostles, all but one (the betrayer, Judas Iscariot, who had hanged himself) of the original apostles were present, and the day began with the occurrence of several extraordinary events relating to them. A mighty downwind filled their room, what appeared to be split tongues of flame sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit which caused them "…to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (vv. 2–4). Peter explained the mighty demonstration of power the people were seeing and hearing as the fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32 which foretold that God would pour forth His Spirit "in the last days." Note the several statements thus far which tie the power Christ promised to the apostles to their receiving the Holy Spirit, being baptized in the Holy Spirit, or having the Holy Spirit poured out upon them. Further, it should not be forgotten that the kingdom, which is the church, was to "come with power," that is, with a demonstration of great power, and it was to come while the apostles were living. Thus, the events on Pentecost signal the fact that the time for the establishment of the kingdom, thus the church, had arrived.
6. Peter's sermon confirms this to be so. He began by quoting and applying Joel's prophecy to explain to the people what they were seeing and hearing (vv. 14–21). He then proceeded to establish the identity of Jesus as the Christ of God, by reminding them of His many miracles and especially by testifying to His resurrec-

tion (vv. 22–32). While arguing the reality of Jesus' resurrection, Peter referred to God's promise to David that He would set one of his sons upon David's throne. Peter quoted from David's sixteenth Psalm in which Peter said David foretold that Christ would be raised up to occupy the promised throne. The apostle next argued that Christ ascended to the Father Who enthroned Him, where He was to remain till the last enemy was subdued (vv. 33–36). The remainder of the New Testament after Acts 2:36 agrees with Peter's declaration that Christ was **already enthroned** (not **expecting** to be enthroned at some future time) at the Father's right hand (Acts 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22). If Christ was enthroned, His kingdom had to be in existence!

7. The Scriptures refer to the church under such figures as a "house," an "indestructible kingdom," and the "mountain of Jehovah's house" in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 7:12–16; Isa. 2:2; Dan. 2:44; et al.). All these allusions (in reference to the earthly existence of the church) **before** the Pentecost of Acts 2 anticipate, prophesy, or promise its coming in the future. **After** Pentecost and Acts 2, the church/kingdom on earth is described as extant with people being added to it daily (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 8:1, 3, 12; 9:31; 11:22; 13:1; 14:23; 20:17; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:9; et al.) .

Conclusion

There can be no doubt in the minds of those who honor what the Word of God teaches that (a) the church of Christ and the prophetic kingdom of God are one and the same, that (b) this Divine institution began in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, and that (c) this is the kingdom in which Christ then began to reign, in which He presently reigns, and in which He shall continue to reign until the last enemy (death) is destroyed.

Jesus sorely disappointed the Jews of His time because they wanted Him to be their political king. They tried to force such a crown and throne upon Him (John 6:15). Had such a kingdom been that which He came to establish, He would surely have accepted this opportunity! The Jews rejected Jesus because He refused to fulfill their literal

kingdom expectations. Had they only taken the trouble to read Jeremiah's prophecy from about 600 B.C., and had they believed it, they would have known that there would never be another material Davidic throne and kingdom. It rendered the literal kingdom expectations of the Jews utterly hopeless. As with men on a host of religious subjects nowadays, it appears that extreme desire became the father of their doctrine, rather than their allowing Scripltural doctrine to determine their desires and hopes!

Jeremiah's prophecy is as destructive to the kingdom expectations of present-day premillennial theorists as it was and is to those of the first-century Jews. There will never be another son of David to reign on his throne on earth. The dispensational "errorists" have built their entire doctrinal scheme upon belief in a literal one-thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. Since this is the cornerstone beneath the dispensational/premillennial structure, by destroying it, the whole of it falls.

This brings us back to our beginning point with Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 15:22–26:

> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death.

Note carefully the following:

1. All will be raised from the dead when Christ comes.
2. The coming of Christ and the great resurrection will mark "the end."
3. When He ushers in "the end" He will deliver the kingdom into the Father's hands.
4. This will mark the end of all rival rule, authority, and power.
5. He must reign till every enemy has been vanquished, the last enemy being death.
6. Death will not be finally destroyed till all have been raised from its clutches.
7. Since He must reign over His kingdom till the resurrection and since the resurrection has not yet occurred, **He is therefore presently reigning over His kingdom**.

When He comes again it will NOT be to set up a kingdom and BEGIN to reign. He is **NOW** King over His kingdom, the Head of His spiritual body, the church (Eph. 1:22–23). It is this kingdom that He will deliver to the Father for its eternal spiritual se-

curity. It is this church that He will save (Eph. 5:23). If one is not in the kingdom/church of Christ he is hopelessly lost, separated from those whom Christ has saved from sin and will save eternally. The hope of sinful mankind rests not in any sort of Messianic reign or kingdom upon this earth. Rather, man's hope rests in being added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:47), translated by God's beloved Son into His kingdom (Col. 1:13). This is accomplished when men invest their faith in Christ as God's Son (John 6:24), repent of their sins (Acts 2:38), confess their faith in the Christ (Acts 8:36–38; Rom. 10:9–10), and are baptized in water unto remission of sins through the blood of Christ (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rev. 1:5; et al.).

The church of Christ, as long as it is truly the church of Christ, will never cease to earnestly proclaim what the Bible teaches concerning the reign and kingdom of Christ. In the very nature of the case, it must also remain unalterably and boldly dedicated to opposing and exposing the errors of all literal political future-kingdom theorists.

Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. A few of the "pioneer" preachers of the nineteenth century held premillennial views. About the only major attempt to superimpose premillennialism on the church was made by R.H. Boll in the early part of the 20th century. His doctrine was exposed and refuted by means of public debate and the publication of various articles and books. In more recent years (1982), Robert Shank, a former Baptist preacher and author, made his premillennial views known publicly in his book, *Until the Coming of Messiah and His Kingdom* and his presentation at the Second Annual Denton Lectures. Even more recently (1993), Carroll D. Osburn, at the time Carmichael Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Abilene Christin University, asserted that premillennialism should not be a fellowship issue as long as one believes that Jesus is the Son of God (see *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 90–91).

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