

Did Jesus Postpone The Kingdom?

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Along with the coming of the Messiah was the Old Testament promise of the kingdom of God. Prophetic texts such as 2 Sam. 7:12; Is. 9:7; Dan 2:44,45 and Daniel 7:21f, all speak of the coming of the Messiah's kingdom.

Jewish beliefs of the kingdom of God centered on reconciliation of the world, the abolishment of all war, suffering and injustice in the world. In other words their view of the Messiah demanded a type of Utopia on earth with Jerusalem and Judaism at its center.

These concepts are without scriptural support. Isaiah's highly figurative language of the peaceful nature of the kingdom of God is by the Jews and Premillennial dispensationalists mistakenly given a literal application for an endtime dismantling of the military operations.

Isaiah prophesied that in the latter days, God would judge between the nations, and rebuke many people. They would turn their weapons of war into tools for agriculture and their, --their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks. Nation would not lift up sword against nation, nor learn war anymore. (Isa. 2:2, 4). See also Isa. 11:6f. This is descriptive of *spiritual* peace in the reign of the Messiah, (Isa. 9:6; Mt. 5:9; Rom. 14:17).

With these misplaced hopes in the foreground, the early expectation of the Jews saw a widespread acceptance and approval of Christ. Multitudes followed him, listened to his teachings and followed his precepts. At the heart of

Jesus' ministry and message was the imminent coming of the kingdom of God. Like John before him, he preached, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel," (Mk. 1:15)

The effectiveness of Jesus' evangelistic mission concerning the coming kingdom was evident in the expectation of the Jews. Clearly some expected the kingdom to immediately appear, Lk. 17:20, 21. Something went terribly wrong that greatly disappointed and disturbed the Jews. Jesus refused to be made a king in the likeness of their expectations, i.e. one that would remove the yoke of Rome and restore them to their formal regal splendor as in the days of David and Solomon.

As Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem for the last time, he fulfilled a prophecy of Zechariah. "Tell the daughter of Zion Behold Your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Matt. 21:5). His reception was spectacular. A very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying; Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" See Psa. 118:26)

The great multitudes of Jews saw Jesus not only as king, but as the prophesied Son of David, i.e. the Messianic King. Ezekiel spoke thusly: "David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them, Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers

dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever." (37:24, 25).

It must not go unnoticed that Jesus rejected the Jewish idea of Military leader charged with the role of destroying Rome. In fact, earlier in His ministry, the Jews planned to forcibly promote Jesus to status of king. He rejected it. "Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone." (Jn. 6:15).

How is it that Jesus announced the coming kingdom, but would have nothing to do with a reign on earth in the form of earthly Jewish expectations? His words to Pilate give us a hint. When he was accused of treason and insurrection, attempting to overthrow Rome's rule by making himself a king, Pilate place him under oath. He questioned Jesus whether he was a king which the Lord did not deny. However, he added, *"My kingdom is not of this world, for 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 here."* (Jn. 18:36)

This is a radical departure from the first century Jewish expectation and that of modern day futurist kingdom advocates such as Tim LaHaye, Jerry Jenkins and Thomas Ice of the premillennial dispensationalists who advocate the necessity of holy wars in the name of Jesus.

The kingdom over which Jesus reigns does not engage its servants in carnal warfare. (2 Cor. 10:3-5) said that God postponed the kingdom due to the Jews' rejection of Christ, catching him as it were, off guard. In its place he

established the church, a monument to his mission and token of failure as explained by dispensationalists.

Nor can it be successfully argued that the idea of abandonment of the kingdom was a development late in the ministry of Christ. At the very beginning of his ministry, during his temptation with the devil, he was offered an opportunity to short cut his mission. All needed was for him to bow to Satan and he could have all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus refused in the strongest of terms, "Away with you Satan" (Mt. 4:10).

From this we learn that an earthly reign is an idea manufactured in the mind of Satan. It is a diabolical scheme that seeks to thwart the true mission of Christ. It is the ultimate rejection of God's reign as indicated in the days of Samuel when the Jews desired an earthly king. When Israel asked Samuel, "Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations," God saw this as a rejection of his reign over Israel. "And the Lord said to Samuel, heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them." (1 Sam. 8:5, 7).

Kingdom futurists believe that Jesus taught that the kingdom was at hand in the earlier days his ministry, (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 4:17), but that somehow it got out of hand and totally out of God's control with respect to setting it up at that time, the very time which God said it would be set up. In short, God failed. Christ was incapable of completing his mission due to the rejection of the Jews.

However, the rejection of the Jews during the ministry of Christ is not hidden from God nor his prophets. "Surely, the Lord God does nothing unless he

reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7). To the contrary, Christ's rejection is prophesied by God, being a common theme of Messianic prophecy. See Isaiah 53, Daniel 9:25, 26; and Zech 13:7; and Psa. 22; 118:22.

Luke writes that it was "necessary for Christ to suffer." (Lk. 24:46). After his resurrection, Jesus met with two disciples who were yet in unbelief about his mission. "then he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory." (Lk. 24:25).

The suffering was the pathway into the kingdom not the occasion for its failure. Jesus was to suffer and then "enter" into His glory. His glory is the kingdom, See Mt. 20:21; Mk. 10:37. Jesus' suffering was not accidental. It was required. "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." (24:7)

Jesus promised to return in the kingdom before some died who were then living at the time he was on earth. "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (Mt. 16:27, 28).

Luke sees the kingdom of God as having arrived in connection with the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, within the first century generation. "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near." Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place." (Lk. 21:31, 32). These were the days of vengeance when all things

written were fulfilled, Lk. 21:20-22). To advocate a postponement of the kingdom is to reject the Scriptures. To overlook the establishment of the kingdom within the first century is to misunderstand the Scriptures. To say that God and Christ failed in their mission to set up the kingdom is to wrest the scriptures. To believe in all things that Christ and the prophets said, is to obey and honor the scriptures. Which do you choose?