

INTRODUCTION

There seems to be a need at this time for a book dealing with the subject of the Kingdom of God as it exists in the present dispensation. This volume is issued with the desire to meet that need, at least to some small extent. And however much it may fall short of accomplishing the aim of the writer, we are at least confident that every reader will find profit in examining the Scriptures which will be brought to his attention herein. "We are deeply convinced of God's power to speak to the simplest of His people directly 'out of the Scriptures'; and we bear in mind also that 'he that is of God heareth God's words.'"

In writing the book entitled *After This: or, the Church, the Kingdom and the Glory*, which was an attempt to examine God's work in this present age as an introduction to the millennial age to come, the writer found the subject of the Kingdom lying directly in his pathway, and demanding investigation. It was a subject he had never set himself to examine; though he had been at various times troubled and perplexed by current teaching on the subject, which teaching he had received with favor because of the deservedly good repute of those who propagated it. But now he was constrained to set aside all preconceptions, and to seek with unbiased mind, and *without consulting any authorities or commentators whatever*, the testimony of the "Word of God on this great subject. The result has been that he has had to modify, in some important particulars, the views previously held, as will be seen by any who are sufficiently interested to read the book referred to above.

"When that book was about ready for the publisher it was suggested to the writer to put forth a concise pamphlet confined to the single question: "What is meant by 'the Kingdom of heaven'?" Accordingly the booklet *The Kingdom of Heaven; What is it? and When? and Where?* was written and published.

The abovementioned books left, of course, many questions untouched. But they served the desired purpose of awakening interest in this subject, and of prompting many of the people of God to inquire into it, and to examine *for themselves* the grounds of their individual views and opinions. They also served to draw forth contributions to the discussion from various quarters, and to procure for the writer the benefit of a great mass of comments, suggestions and criticisms. This has been useful in compelling him to examine carefully all the Scriptures cited, and the inferences which various students of the Bible have drawn from them, and in compelling him also to view the subject from every angle. And the result of it all has been to bring out of the Scriptures much positive truth — "things new and old" — touching THE KINGDOM OF GOD. And let it be remembered that the *Kingdom of God* was the subject of the risen Lord's instructions to His disciples preparatory to their worldwide mission (see Acts 1:3), and was also the subject of Paul's testimony and preaching to the end of his days (Acts 20:25; 28:23, 31).

The fruits of all these investigations we now seek to present to the household of faith in a manner that shall be free, so far as possible, from controversial character; and happily this can be done to a very large extent. There remains, however, the unavoidable necessity, in presenting what we deem to be the teaching and testimony of Scripture on this subject, of examining current teachings which are in conflict therewith. This we shall seek to do with all proper consideration and respect for those whose views it is needful to discuss.

Among current teachings which come under review is one that presents itself in diverse forms, and

of which the basic idea is that the preaching of John the Baptist, and of Christ and His Apostles, was the announcement or "offer" to Israel of the earthly kingdom, involving the breaking of the yoke of Roman dominion, the promotion of Israel to the foremost place among the nations, and in general the fulfillment of all God's promises concerning the throne of Israel, the Holy Land, and the earthly Jerusalem. Such, it is said, was the character of the preaching until the proffered Kingdom was rejected by the leaders of Israel, whereupon (according to this view) God withdrew the "offer" and postponed the era of Israel's earthly greatness to a future dispensation.

According to some, this change of plan on God's part, or "dispensational change" as it is termed, took place about the time of the events recorded in Matthew, chapters 11 and 12, when (it is claimed) the Kingdom of heaven, previously announced, was set aside and replaced by what is called "the Kingdom in mystery form."

But there is an extraordinary diversity of opinion as to *just where* the "dispensational break" occurred. Some say the final rejection of the earthly kingdom of Israel occurred when the Savior was crucified, which implies that the "offer" of the kingdom had not up to that time been withdrawn.

Others hold and teach that the Apostles, after the Lord's resurrection and the coming of the Holy Ghost, still continued to offer the earthly kingdom to Israel until the stoning of Stephen, and that the "break" and "change of dispensation" occurred at *that* time.

Still others maintain stoutly, and with much show of reason, that the kingdom dispensation continued until Acts 28; and that, when Paul said to the Jews at Rome "Be it known to you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28), *then* the "break" occurred and the new dispensation of grace began. According to this last stated view (which we are bound to say is the only logical and consistent view when once the premise of an offer of the earthly kingdom to Israel is admitted), the "gospel" preached by Peter, Paul, and other apostles to the Israelites, was "another gospel," and the "Church of God" which Paul persecuted (1 Corinthians 15:9) was a different "church" to that mentioned in Ephesians and Colossians. And, moreover, all the churches spoken of in the Acts and in the earlier Epistles of Paul, belonged to a past dispensation, along with Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The most important consequence of the foregoing doctrine, which for convenience we will term the "postponement theory," is that it detaches a portion of the New Testament — greater or less according to where the "break" is located — from the rest, and assigns the detached portion to the Jews. According to the view of the most conservative teachers of this theory, the earlier chapters of Matthew, *including the, Sermon on the Mount*, belong to the past dispensation of law, and are not for the Church. A leading exponent of that theory says: "The Sermon on the Mount is *law*, and that *raised to its most deathful and destructive potency.*"¹ This doctrine is so novel, so startling, and so exceedingly serious in its consequences that we are most assuredly bound to test it with all possible care. The Lord Jesus said of His own words that "they are *Spirit* and they are *life*" (John 6:63). But here is an authority who declares that they are "*law*" and "deathful" to the most extreme limit. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, 7 the Old Covenant is described as the Covenant of *law* and *death*, and the New Covenant as the Covenant of *Spirit* and *life*. To which of these do the words and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ belong? There is for the believer no question more important than this; but it is an astounding thing that any *question* should arise about it.

Obviously, those who locate the supposed dispensational change at a later time than the events of Matthew 12, detach a proportionately larger part of the New Testament Scriptures from this present dispensation.

Since we are now only stating the situation that prompted the writing of the present volume, we

1 "Dispensational Place of Synoptic Gospels," by C. I. Scofield.

would simply raise at this point the question whether the difficulty our friends have in agreeing as to where the supposed “break” occurred may not perhaps be due to the fact that *there was no “break” at all?* If so, then all the conflicting groups would be correct in so far as they deny the existence of any “break” where the other parties say it occurred.

One of the main principles by which we seek to be guided in searching the Scriptures for their witness on this subject, is that great fact for which the Lord Jesus thanked His Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, namely, that it had pleased Him to hide these things from the wise and prudent and to reveal them unto babes (Matthew 11:25). By this fact we are assured that the testimony of Scripture in regard to *these very things into which we are now searching* will be found expressed in “words easy to be understood” (1 Corinthians 14:9); and that the *true* meaning of passages bearing upon them will, ordinarily if not invariably, be the *simple* and *evident* meaning thereof.

For example, the statement, “the Kingdom of heaven is at hand,” should be given the simple meaning which it has always had until the sudden springing up, in our day, of the postponement theory. And this principle constrains us — when God announced a certain “kingdom” as “at hand,” and then set about immediately to introduce a *kingdom* among men, calling it by *precisely the same name* as that which He had announced — to hold that the kingdom which God introduced was the one He said He was about to introduce. This we are bound to assume, unless we find clear statements of Scripture declaring the contrary to have been the case, and declaring in fact that God did not announce the kingdom He was about to introduce, nor introduce the kingdom which He had announced.

This principle of interpreting a passage according to its plain and simple meaning is of the utmost importance in the inquiry we are now making, for the reason that the advocates of the postponement theory do not even pretend to offer proof from Scripture in support of it. They rely for its acceptance solely upon the claim that by their theory it is possible to explain passages which (they say) are otherwise obscure, or to harmonize passages which (they say) are otherwise conflicting. But we are bold to say (and refer our readers to the following pages for ample proof of what we now assert) that the supposedly obscure passages (as Matthew 10:23) stand in need of no contrivance, such as the postponement theory, to explain them, and that the supposedly conflicting passages require no such aid to harmonize them. In fact the theory introduces far more and far greater difficulties than those it essays to remove.

Furthermore, this principle is “simple,” and is therefore suited to “babes.” But its very simplicity seems to be the reason why it is not acceptable to those who advocate the view we are discussing. Thus, we read in the paper quoted above:

“Perhaps the average pastor would suggest Matthew to a young convert as the best first book in Bible Study.”

And surely the place in which God has set the Gospel of Matthew and the character of its contents I would naturally lean to that view. But not so, according to our authority, who says:

“The Gospel according to Matthew is, taking into account the preconceptions and misconceptions which are in the minds of people” — that is, people who do not hold the postponement theory — precisely the most difficult book in the Bible for a beginner.”

Here is presented to us a very sharp difference of opinion between “the average pastor” and the leading advocate of the postponement theory. Which is right according to the Scriptures?

And further our author says:

“It (Matthew’s Gospel) *ought to be* delightfully simple.”

To this we say “Amen.” Seeing it was specially intended for “babes,” most certainly it “*ought to be* delightfully simple.” And we confidently add, so indeed it *is* to those who are willing to *be* simple.

We are well aware that in past days, and still largely now, there is confusion and misunderstanding

as to the Kingdom of heaven, arising from the fact that the parables of the *Kingdom* have been regarded as if they were parables of the *Church*. But that confusion was completely cleared up by the studies and writings of godly men of the generation just passed, men who at the same time stood most uncompromisingly for the direct application of the Sermon on the Mount, and all the other "words," "sayings," and "commandments" of the Lord Jesus Christ, to God's children in this present era.

And this brings us to another preliminary point. We have referred to the postponement theory as something quite new in our day. And so it is. But many believers have become so familiarized with it, and so accustomed to regard it as long and well-settled truth, that they are surprised at its being called into question. Indeed the present writer has been told that the position taken in his former books is "revolutionary." But it is just the other way. The doctrine that every believer is in the Kingdom of heaven, and that only those who are born again, becoming as little children, can enter it, is simple truth, and elementary truth, too, which lies on the surface of the Gospels. The view that the Kingdom of heaven as announced by the Lord Jesus Christ, with the laws of that Kingdom uttered by Him, are "Jewish," and belong to another dispensation, is a view that is entirely new and could be properly described as "revolutionary." But some of our friends who oppose us are well aware that, as regards the particular point now under consideration, we are not advancing anything new or revolutionary. In fact it is spoken of in a current magazine as "this *old* theory."

We are sometimes told that the postponement theory is found in the writings of godly men who now have ceased from their fruitful labors, such as J. N. Darby, C. H. McIntosh, William Kelly, F. W. Grant, and others who were greatly used of God in teaching His children. The present writer has therefore deemed it his duty to consult the writings of those men of God, so far as their writings were accessible. The results of his investigations fully confirm our statement as to the entire novelty of the postponement theory; and this will be shown herein (Chapter 18 and following).

Finally, we have sought to examine patiently every Scripture and every deduction from Scripture that has been brought to our attention as tending in any way to support the postponement theory. And it has been a matter of surprise to us that such arguments as have been advanced and have been repeated over and over, should ever have been put forth at all. Again and again we have been constrained to wonder whether the advocates of the postponement theory have ever examined their own arguments in the light of the Scriptures. For our experience has been that the very passages to which they most frequently appeal prove to be, even upon a slight examination, directly opposed to their contention. Striking instances of this peculiar feature of the ease will be found in the following pages.

We do not, of course, undertake to explain every difficult passage or to answer every question that may arise. After we have done our utmost there will still remain abundant opportunity for investigations by others; for the subject is a large one. But what we *may* hope to accomplish is to set before our readers the *controlling facts and evidences of Scripture*; by which the *main issues* involved are authoritatively settled. Those evidences, as we confidently claim, prove beyond a doubt that "grace and truth" — not "*law* in its most deathful and destructive potency" (let the reader weigh well the meaning of those words) — "came by Jesus Christ." When that *basic fact* is firmly established in the reader's mind, and when he himself is firmly established in that basic fact, other connected matters will be readily apprehended by him, and all difficulties and perplexities will eventually be cleared away.

With no confidence in the flesh, but with supreme confidence in Him Who uses the weak things of this world in the accomplishment of His great ends, this humble effort in His service is submitted to those who tremble at His word, and who delight greatly in His commandments.