

The Kingdom of God

by Benjamin Franklin

The sermon explores the nature, establishment, and significance of the kingdom of God as revealed through scripture and the ministry of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, John 3:5, Acts 2:1, Romans 14:17, Colossians 1:13, Hebrews 12:28, Revelation 1:9

Topics: "Kingdom Of God", "Church Establishment"

Description

Benjamin Franklin preaches about the kingdom of God, explaining that the terms 'kingdom of God,' 'kingdom of heaven,' 'his kingdom,' and 'kingdom of his dear Son' are all interchangeable. He emphasizes that the church, the body of Christ, the house of God, and the temple of God are all representations of the kingdom of God. Franklin delves into the establishment of the kingdom of God, highlighting that it was not fully established before the ascension of Christ to heaven, providing scriptural evidence and explanations for this. He concludes by addressing the question of whether the kingdom of God has yet come or been established, presenting arguments and scriptures to affirm that the kingdom of God was in existence during the apostles' time and continues to exist, with believers entering into it through conversion.

Transcript

THE purpose of this article is to answer the following questions:

- I. What is the kingdom of God?
- II. Was the kingdom of God fully established before the ascension of Christ to heaven?
- III. Has the kingdom of God yet come, or been established?

Without preliminary or ceremony, let attention be directed to these questions:

- I. What is the kingdom of God?

That the same is meant by "kingdom of God," "kingdom of heaven," "his kingdom," and the "kingdom of his dear Son," as a general rule, there can be but little doubt, whether the same is meant in every instance or not. That which is called "his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28) is called "the kingdom of God" (Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). The same kingdom mentioned in the phrase, "the Son of man coming in his kingdom," is also mentioned in the phrase "the kingdom of God," for these are two reports of the same speech. The two expressions are simply two designations of the same kingdom. [198] The same, precisely, that is called

"the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:23) is called "the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). In Matthew the record is: "That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of God." The "kingdom of heaven" at hand, as recorded (Matt. 3:2), is undoubtedly the same as the "kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14), for these are two records of the same thing. The same kingdom is meant (Matt. 13:11) in the words, "Because to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," that is meant (Mark 4:11) in "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God." "He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11), and "He that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28), are simply two records of the same thing, and the same kingdom is meant in both records.

In the following language the phrases "my church" and "the kingdom of heaven" are two designations for the same. That which is called "my church" is called "the kingdom of heaven." "I say also to you, that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it; and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (See Matt. 16:18, 19.) When we think and speak of what the [199] Lord calls "my church," we should keep in mind that He calls the same thing, in the same connection, "the kingdom of heaven," and that He calls the same "my kingdom" (John 18:36). Paul's "general assembly and church of the firstborn," to which he said "we are come" (Heb. 12:23), is the same as his "kingdom that cannot be moved" (verse 28 of the same chapter). It is the same as his "one body" (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:13). All who enter the "one body" at all are immersed into it, or all who enter the kingdom at all, which is the same as entering the "one body," enter it by being born of water and of the Spirit. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see [or enjoy] the kingdom of God." (See John 3:3.) "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (See John 3:5.) The same community is styled "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:13). "In Christ" is in the body, church or kingdom. To know what the church is, the body of Christ, the house of God, the temple of God, the building of God, is to know what the kingdom of God is. This view will assist much in ascertaining what the kingdom of God is, and several other things to be investigated in this article.

When we are thinking of the Lord's community as a body, we think of the head and the [200] individual members, the life and support of the body. When we think of the same community as a house, or family, we immediately think of the head of the family, the members, the discipline and ruling of a family, the care and oversight of a family, the support and dependence of a family, the accession by birth or adoption, whichever figure may be used, and the losses by death, or those who have abandoned the family. When we think of the same community as a temple, or building, we think of the proprietor, foundation, the lively stones built together in it, and the builders. When we think of it as a kingdom, we think of a king, constitution, laws, territory, subjects. When we think of it literally, as the church, congregation or community founded by Christ, the only divinely founded religious community on earth, we think of God, who authorized it; of the prophets, who predicted its founding, with many of its stupendous and momentous surroundings--the Lord Messiah, who founded it; the great truth on which it is built; the authorized apostles and evangelists who first preached the gospel, called people together, under their new head, in the new community, or the church, making "one new man." It has Christ for its head; the gospel--the power of God--to turn the world to God; the teaching of Christ and His apostles for its edification and instruction. Christ is its supreme authority for everything. His authority [201] is set forth in His own teaching and that of His divinely authorized and inspired apostles.

The church, or community of the living God, is composed of members, and has a head, gospel, teaching or territory. Bishops or overseers, and, deacons, in their work, are limited to the congregation in their own vicinity, having no jurisdiction in other congregations. The church of the living God, the body of Christ, or kingdom of God, embraces all the local congregations, with the members, in all the world--all who are truly the people of God. As a whole, it is not an organized body, and has no method of acting in conventional form, in making decrees, laws or decisions. Its head has made, signed, sealed and delivered to it His laws and decrees, and demands of the church, or kingdom, implicit obedience. It is not the business of the church to make laws or decrees, but implicitly to obey and submit to the laws and decrees made by the head of the church.

This community, church or kingdom, of which Christ is the head or King, and all that pertains to it, was embraced in "the eternal purpose of God," but had no existence, in the form of a community, church or kingdom, only in the purpose of God, for ages. The same that was embodied in the eternal purpose--"a secret," "hid in God"--was subsequently embodied in the promise to Abraham. It was still a secret, a mystery, in a promise of a blessing for all the families of the [202] earth, without any revelation explaining what that blessing was. That promise embraced the Messiah, the gospel, the church, and all the attendant blessings for the human race. Still, the church, or kingdom, did not exist in fact, and the blessings were spoken of as "good things to come," and not good things already come. The same precisely, embodied first in the purpose, and then in the promise of God, subsequently filled a large space in prophecy, but still as "good things to come." Peter has the following comment touching the prophets: "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come to you: searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to us, they did minister these things, which are now reported to you by them who have preached the gospel to you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; into which things the angels desire to look." (See 1 Pet. 1:10-12.) The kingdom of God is found, first, in the eternal purpose of God, then in the promise of God to Abraham, then in the prophecy, and then in the preaching of John the Immerser. In the preaching of John it is in different form, and a new item comes into the preaching. It is now "the kingdom of God at hand," "the kingdom [203] of God approaches," etc. This opens the way for the inquiry:

II. Was the kingdom of God fully established before the ascension of Christ to heaven?

This question deserves a very full and satisfactory answer. That the kingdom, or church, was not fully established, in operation, and doing its work in the lifetime of the Saviour, is evident from the following Scriptures and considerations:

1. If the church, or kingdom, had been established fully, in operation, doing its work, and the apostles not only members of the church, or citizens of the kingdom, but active agents in it, the apostles and all His disciples, at that time, could not have been so greatly mistaken as they were, and as they remained till they had interviews with the Lord after His resurrection, in reference to the nature of His kingdom. In an interview with the Lord, after He rose from the dead, the disciples said: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel" (See Acts 1:6.) From this request, it is evident that they were not conscious of His having established a kingdom; that they did not yet understand that His kingdom was to be one "not of this world," but expected a kingdom for Israel like the one in the time of David or Solomon, and that they were still looking for the kingdom to come. When He died they desponded, supposed His purpose was [204] defeated, and said: "We trusted that it was he who should have redeemed Israel." (See Luke 24:21.)

But when He rose, their hope revived that He would redeem Israel from their oppression by the Romans, restore to them their national honors, and be their king; and, in view of this, made the request that He would restore the kingdom to Israel. This shows that they knew nothing about His having already established any kingdom. They certainly, as His ministers, would have known it had the kingdom been fully established. It was not then established.

2. After the Lord had entered His ministry fully, and was completely before the people, instead of His regarding His kingdom or church as established, He said, as quoted before on a different point: "On this rock I will build my church." Did He say, "I will build my church," when He had built His church? In the next verse (Matt. 16:19) he says: "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." At this advanced period in the Lord's ministry He was looking into the future for the building of His church, and the giving of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, or the power to open the church, to Peter. The church was not built, and the kingdom not opened, when the Lord uttered this language. [205]

3. The first commission was limited to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." Under this commission the preachers were expressly forbidden to go in the way of the Gentiles. John the Immerser came "preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (See Matt. 3:3.) "At hand" did not mean that it had come, or that it was far off. In the first commission, as recorded in Matt. 10:5-7, the Lord commanded the apostles to "go not in the way of the Gentiles, nor into any city of the Samaritans; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was the main theme under the first commission: to call the people to repentance, to immerse them, and prepare them for the near approaching kingdom, or reign of heaven.

4. In view of the approaching kingdom, or reign of heaven, the Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (See Matt. 6:10.) This corresponds with the preaching. The disciples were commanded to preach that the kingdom was at hand, and to pray for it to come, and that "the will of God should be done on earth as it is in heaven." He certainly did not teach them to pray "Thy kingdom come," after the kingdom had come. [206]

5. The Lord said: "Verily I say to you, that there be some of them that stand here who shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." Did the Lord say this when He knew that they had seen the kingdom, and were ministers in it? Surely there can be no good reason for thinking so. They had been preaching that the kingdom was at hand, praying for it to come, and believed that it would come. They had forsaken their business and followed the Lord. They had preached and prayed, as He told them to do, but did not understand the nature of the main matter involved in their preaching and prayers. They were pressing the Lord for explanations in reference to things which it was not proper to open up yet. They expected pecuniary support, and probably office, or some kind of worldly honors and promotions in the Government, which they still kept in view, and frequently became restless and impatient. Such expressions as the one just quoted were intended and calculated to satisfy the disciples and pacify them, without a full explanation of what He did not intend to explain at that time, or that anybody should fully understand. It was true that the kingdom had not then come, but that some who stood there should not die till they saw it come.

6. The explanation that the Lord made before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world," as recorded in John 18:36, shows that the kingdom [207] was not yet fully established. Pilate inquired: "Are you the king of the Jews?" This question looked to the charge, "He is the king of the Jews," which was intended to fasten

reasonable purposes on Him. Had He been then an established king of the Jews, or of His disciples, with a kingdom fully established and in operation as a distinct body, in any form, there would certainly have been no difficulty in identifying either the king or the kingdom. He, however, did not deny that He had a kingdom in view, but explained that it was not of this world--that He was no rival of Cæsar; that this kingdom was no rival of the Roman Government, or any other civil government, as it was not of this world, but a heavenly, a spiritual or a religious institution, entirely distinct from the governments of the world.

7. Beyond all doubt, the kingdom of God, or church, was not fully established while the apostles, who were the active and effective agents in preaching the gospel, making disciples, founding churches, setting them in order--advocating, maintaining and defending the faith--were erring, blundering and misunderstanding in reference to some of the clearest, most vital and fundamental matters of the kingdom, or church; while they did not believe the Lord's own clear statement touching His betrayal into the hands of enemies, His crucifixion, death and resurrection; while they were doubting and wavering; while they all had their hearts set [208] on an earthly king and kingdom, a mere worldly government; while one of His apostles was a traitor, engaged in a treasonable conspiracy which resulted in the betrayal of his Master, and another, fearing to be identified with his Lord, denied Him three times, and uttered bitter oaths; while the account of His resurrection, when reported to the apostles, "seemed to them as idle tales;" while they were all inquiring, "Wilt thou, at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel" while the Lord, instead of acting in the capacity of the King, High Priest, filled the place of the suffering, bleeding and dying victim! Certainly the kingdom was not fully established before the Lord rose from the dead; before He gave the apostles the Great Commission, to "go into all the world"--to "preach the gospel to every creature"; before He ascended to heaven, "led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men"--"sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth;" before the great High Priest of the Christian profession had gone into the true Holy Place, of which the holy places on earth were only typical--into heaven itself, with His own blood, to appear in the presence of God for us--to make His one sin-offering in the end of the ages--the only sin-offering that can purge us forever from our sins. To say that the kingdom was fully established at any period while the matters here mentioned were transpiring, is certainly the culmination of all absurdity. [209]

It may be urged, in opposition to this, that the Lord said to some in His time: "The kingdom of God is in you." He certainly did not mean that the kingdom of God was in the hearts of those wicked and caviling Jews to whom He spoke. While it is true that the Greek preposition translated "in" literally means in, it is equally true that there are places where it should not be rendered in. This maybe learned from the scope and connection generally. The case in hand is one of that kind. "The kingdom of God is among you," instead of in you or in your midst, is the true idea. In what sense was the kingdom of God among them? In its elements, its incipient or preliminary state; in John the Immerser, the people prepared for the Lord by him, by the apostles, and the seventy whom the Lord sent out under the first commission. It was in the Lord Himself, in those whom He sent, and the disciples they were making gradually coming forth, steadily developing itself, being more and more fully unfolded, till its full and complete establishment, in a visible form, on Pentecost.

Here we arrive at a grand culmination, a glorious period, and a full development of what has been preparing, unfolding and developing regularly, but gradually, for several years. Here we find the grand change in the apostles. Their erring, blundering, wavering and misunderstanding ceased. Their timidity, fear to be identified [210] with Jesus, and want of independence ceased. Their ideas of a kingdom of this world at once vanished. Their unbelief terminated. Every man of them becomes bold, independent, and firm as the everlasting hills. No priests, no rabbis; no lawyers, doctors or philosophers; no jurists,

statesmen or rulers of any sort--now intimidate them. They openly proclaim the gospel in the face of the world. What they say at the start they say all the time. Not a man of them ever relinquished his ground, departed from or repudiated a truth uttered by any one of them, from this time on. All that was done before this grand change in the apostles was preparatory and preliminary. What was done after this change was in carrying out their great commission in the new administration. After this period, they were acting under their new commission as the ambassadors of the new King; making known the new law; using the keys in opening the new kingdom, or church; bringing light out of darkness, and order out of confusion. A more clearly marked line never was described between any old and new orders of things than the one between the state of things before the Holy Spirit came to guide the apostles into all truth, and the state of things after that event. Still, some are doubting whether the kingdom of God has yet come, or is yet established. Others are claiming that their doubts have all been removed--that they are convinced that the kingdom [211] has not come--and are laboring with great zeal to prove this. This opens the way for the third question to be considered in this article:

III. Has the kingdom of God yet come, or been established?

To this question the following arguments shall be addressed. The question is not whether "the everlasting kingdom" has come, of which we read (2 Pet. 1:11); nor whether the kingdom, "delivered up to God, even the Father," as described by Paul (1 Cor. 15:24), or the kingdom in the glorified state, has come. The question to be considered relates not to the period when all the enemies of the Lord shall have been put under His feet--when the Lord "shall show who is the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords." That the kingdom in that state, and the time when the King will show this, has not come, all persons of good Bible intelligence will admit. But has the kingdom, in the sense in which John the Immerser speaks of it when he says, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," or the kingdom of which John thus speaks; for the coming of which the Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come;" the kingdom to which the Lord referred when he said to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven"--has this kingdom come? Is the kingdom in existence of which the Lord spoke when He said: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot [212] enter into the kingdom of God"? Is there any kingdom of heaven, or of Christ, in existence at this time? Is the Lord Jesus the Christ, King? Has Jesus any reign on earth? Has Messiah any kingdom on earth? It is affirmed in this article that the Messiah is King--that He has a kingdom. The following arguments are offered in proof of this:

1. The first argument offered in support of the position just taken is, that there is no way to account for the change from the first commission to the second, or for the difference between these commissions, except by admitting that the kingdom "at hand," as preached in the first commission, had come when the apostles commenced preaching under the second. John the Immerser, the Lord, the twelve apostles, and the seventy whom the Lord sent out under the first commission, all preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Under the last commission they were not commanded to preach; saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The reason is that the "kingdom at hand," while they were under the first commission, had come when they commenced under the second. They were not simply not commanded to preach, under the second commission, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," but they never did thus preach. But if the kingdom of heaven has not come, was the preaching, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," true? It [213] was not true that it was at hand then, if it has not come yet.

2. The Lord, while the apostles were under the first commission, taught the disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come." This was the grand theme during that period of preaching and prayer. The Lord did not teach them to pray for the kingdom to come after the kingdom had come. There is no account of any holy

teacher ever teaching the disciples to pray for the kingdom to come after the Lord ascended to heaven; nor is there any intimation of any one ever praying for the kingdom to come after that event. The reason is, that the kingdom had come.

3. It is perfectly clear, from several Scriptures, that the apostles understood that all things proclaimed by John to be at hand were fulfilled when the church was established on Pentecost. Paul explains to the disciples of John, in Ephesus, that "John truly immersed with the immersion of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." (See Acts 19:4.) Here is clearly the general idea that what John preached as "at hand" had actually come; was fulfilled at the time when Paul made this comment. The same is clear from Paul's remarks as recorded in Acts 13:23, 24. He says, "Of this man's seed hath God, according to his promise, raised up to Israel a Saviour, Jesus," when John had first [214] preached, before His coming, the immersion of repentance to all Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said: "Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose." These Scriptures, with other references to John and his immersion, show that the things by him proclaimed to be at hand, to come, and drawing nigh, were fulfilled, had actually come, when the apostles referred back to them. The central idea in the preaching of John was that the kingdom of God was at hand.

4. When the Lord was on trial in the Roman court, Pilate put the question to Him, "Are you a king" Though He was then only prospectively a king, He did not deny being a king, nor of having a kingdom, though it was then in an incipient state, but explained: "My kingdom is not of this world." (See John 18:36.) Paul was accused of "saying that there was another king, one Jesus." (See Acts 17:7.) There is no intimation, in the whole record, of Paul's correcting this charge, or denying it. If he had not preached that Jesus was a king, he certainly would have denied the charge, or would have explained what he did preach, or Luke would have written out an explanation of their unfounded charge. But the truth is that He had a kingdom, when He was before Pilate, in its elements, like leaven at work in the meal; like the mustard-seed planted, but not [215] matured--not formed and perfected, but the kingdom coming. At the time Paul was charged with preaching that Jesus was a king, the kingdom had come, and the disciples were in the kingdom.

5. The Lord said to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Does not that imply that when a man is born again, he shall see or enjoy the kingdom of God? "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." A man, then, enters the kingdom of God by a birth of water and of the Spirit. When does he enter the kingdom? At the time when he is born of water and of the Spirit, or at some subsequent period? Certainly at the time when he is born of water and of the Spirit. The time when he is born of water and of the Spirit is, literally, the time when he is converted. The time when a man is converted is the time, then, when he enters the kingdom. The kingdom had then come, in the time of the apostles, and the thousands turned to the Lord under their preaching entered the kingdom of God.

6. Before the kingdom was fully established, and before the door was opened, the Lord said to Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (See Matt. 16:19.) This work also related to the [216] remission of sins, as may be seen by John 20:23: "Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them: and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." This using the keys was to be performed in their divine mission on earth, and in connection with the remission of sins. Certainly Peter did not use the keys of the kingdom of God in opening the kingdom, when there was no kingdom, or when the kingdom had not come. To use these keys of the kingdom, or to "remit sins," was to open the

way to the remission of sins, or to open the kingdom and admit subjects into the new reign. Jesus, as the King, gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom, to use in his divine mission on earth. This he could not have done if there had been no kingdom on earth in his time. Peter did bind and loose on earth, and what he bound and loosed on earth was ratified in heaven. That binding and loosing on earth was in opening the kingdom of God--declaring the terms of remission of sins, in the time of Peter, on earth. There was, then, a kingdom on earth, in the time of Peter, to open, and it was a part of his work, in his mission, to open it.

7. Alluding to the same kingdom, in the same conversation, as recorded further on in the same chapter (Matt. 16:28), after saying to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom," the Lord said, "There be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming [217] in his kingdom;" or, as reported in Mark 9:1: "Till they leave seen the kingdom of God come with power." Some have supposed that this had its fulfillment in the mountain of transfiguration. But it can not, with any good reason, be said that the kingdom came there in any sense, or that it was even represented in vision. The King was there shown, and His divine majesty seen as it is now seen in heaven; and three witnesses--Peter, James and John--were enabled to say, as Peter did (2 Pet. 1:16-18): "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." The King was shown here, in divine majesty, as He would appear in the near approaching reign, to His eye-witnesses, that they might be able to testify, as Peter did. The promise, in the words, "There be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom," or "till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power," was not that they should see Jesus in divine majesty, or the glorified Jesus, but "see him coming in his kingdom," or "see the kingdom of God [218] come with power." This they did not see in the mountain of transfiguration, but did see before they tasted death. The event described in the second chapter of Acts met and fulfilled not only what the Lord meant when He said, "See the kingdom of God come with power," but what was spoken of by Joel and other prophets. A complete change in the apostles followed the grand and sublime transaction on Pentecost--from wavering to stability, from unbelief to the full assurance of faith, from timidity to boldness, from doubts to certainty; from the first to the second commission; from errors, blunders and mistakes to infallible guidance of the Spirit of all truth and all revelation; from the long series of preparatory and preliminary work to the grand culmination in the kingdom, and the entrance of three thousand souls into the new kingdom.

8. "The seed of the kingdom is the word of God," and certainly "the seed of the kingdom," "the word of the kingdom," belongs to the period of the existence of the kingdom, and not some period when the kingdom has no existence. The sowing of the seed of the kingdom is preaching the gospel. The parables of the sower, the leaven in the meal, and several other parables, show that the fortunes of the kingdom are in this world; that the tares and the wheat were to grow together, if not in the kingdom, in the same territory, and at the same time, and that, at the end of the world; [219] the Lord would send his angels and gather out all things offensive. (See Matt. 13:26-29.)

9. Paul, speaking of the kingdom of God, as existing in his times, tells what it is not and what it is. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. (See Rom. 14:17.) The apostles proceeds in the next verse: "For he that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God." The kingdom of God, of which Paul wrote, was in existence at the time of his writing, and men served Christ in it.

10. The Lord commissioned Paul to preach in the following words: "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness, both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in the which I will appear to you; delivering you from the people and the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified through faith in me." (See Acts 26:16-18.) This work was to be done under Paul's mission, or during his natural life. Turning, then, from darkness to light was the same as delivering them from the power of darkness. This corresponds with the following language: "Giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; [220] who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (See Col. 1:12, 13.) Those whom Paul here includes with himself were turned into the kingdom of God's dear Son, They were in a kingdom that had then come, that then existed, and not one that had no existence.

11. John the apostle, in addressing the seven churches in Asia, says: "I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the island called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." While in this world, John the apostle, and those to whom he wrote, were in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. The kingdom had come, and they were in the kingdom. In this kingdom the Lord Jesus shall reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet, and then He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all.

12. Paul says: "You are come to mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven;" and speaking of the same body further on, he says, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (See Heb. 12:21-28.) They had come to this [221] "church of the firstborn," "general assembly," or "kingdom," and were exhorted to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, when Paul wrote the letter to the church in Rome. It has already been shown that the "church" and "kingdom of God" are two designations for the same institution. To maintain, therefore, that there is no kingdom of God is the same as to maintain that there is no church of God, no temple of God, no building or house of God, or no body of Christ. It is the same as to deny that there is any "house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth," or that there was any, during the time the apostles were acting under the last commission, actually existing. Every reference, during the time the apostles were acting under the last commission, to the church, the body of Christ, the building of God, the house of God, as then in existence, is a standing refutation of the theory that there is no kingdom of God in existence at this time.

There was, then, a kingdom of God in the time of the apostles; Peter used the keys of the kingdom, opened it; persons "born of water and of the Spirit" entered it; that kingdom is now in existence, and men and women enter into it, and are, therefore, properly said to be in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. [222]

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