

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART XXXV

by Andy Woods

We began scrutinizing New Testament texts that "kingdom now" theologians employ in an attempt to argue that the kingdom is a present reality in order to show that none of these passages teach a present form of the kingdom. We have examined the typical texts from the Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, the general epistles, and Revelation used by "kingdom now" theologians. At this point, we largely find ourselves in agreement with the following statement by E.R. Craven. Concerning "the passages which have been referred to as proving the doctrine of a present establishment" and "those passages which, it is alleged, logically imply a present establishment of the Basileia," Craven notes, "There is no critically undisputed passage in the Scriptures which declares, or necessarily implies, even a *partial* establishment in New Testament times."¹ In this and the next installment, we will begin to take a look at some other miscellaneous arguments used by "kingdom now" theologians.

ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE

Since the biblical text itself fails to positively teach or convey the notion of a present spiritual establishment of the messianic kingdom of God, it is common for "kingdom now" theologians to appeal to an argument from silence. According to this line of thought, since the New Testament fails to mention or emphasize a future earthly kingdom, then the promise of a future terrestrial rule of Christ has somehow been cancelled. Since this promise of a future earthly reign of Christ is cancelled, due to this alleged silence, the Bible's kingdom promises are being fulfilled now in the present Church Age. Amillennialist and "Kingdom Now" and Replacement Theologian Bruce Waltke makes this common argument:

Not one clear New Testament passage mentions the restoration of Israel as a political nation or predicts an earthly reign of Christ before His final appearing. None depicts the consummate glory of Christ as an earthly king ruling over the restored nation of Israel. The silence is deafening.²

Knox Seminary resorts to the same argument. According to a document entitled "The Knox Seminary Open Letter to Evangelicals":

Instructively, this same Simon Peter, the Apostle to the Circumcision, says nothing about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel in the land of Palestine...No New Testament writer foresees a regathering of ethnic Israel in the land, as did the prophets of the Old Testament after the destruction of the first temple in 586 B.C.³

Regarding "Kingdom Now" theologians (or Christian anti-Zionists), Bruce Scott observes how they:

...use a fallacious argument from silence to prove their point. They falsely assume their position on the holy land is true simply because the New Testament writers spoke so infrequently of God's land promises to Israel and Israel's restoration to its land. On one occasion, when confronted about his argument from silence, Gary Burge countered, "It is such a loud silence."⁴

For the sake of discussion, let us assume that Bruce Waltke, Knox Seminary, and Gary Burge are all correct in their assessment that the New Testament is silent on the matter of Christ's future earthly rule. Is it true that subsequent silence on a prior subject is the same thing as a cancellation of it? Such thinking represents a logical fallacy known as an "argument from silence" where it is incorrectly assumed that silence on a matter is the same thing as a cancellation of it. For example, suppose I, as a professor, inform my students on the course syllabus of the date of the final exam. If I fail to mention the final exam's date again throughout the course of the semester, would my students be justified in concluding that the final exam has now been cancelled? In other words, is subsequent verbal silence about the final exam

throughout the course of the semester the same thing as canceling what the original syllabus indicates concerning the final? Of course not. The syllabus says what it says and is to be followed unless I as the professor expressly alter it verbally in the presence of my students. In the same way, it cannot be presupposed that New Testament silence somehow cancels Old Testament predictions and promises.

If the New Testament somewhere expressly canceled the Old Testament earthly kingdom promises, then "kingdom now" theology would be valid. However, the great problem for the "kingdom now" theologian is that there is nothing overt in the Old Testament that cancels these future kingdom promises, thereby forcing the "kingdom now" theologian to rely upon alleged New Testament silence or its lack of emphasis on the topic. Arnold Fruchtenbaum makes this very point in his critique of Replacement Theologian Stephen Sizer:

Furthermore, the New Testament does not have to mention something specific from the Old Testament to maintain that the Old Testament promise is ongoing. What the author needs is a clear statement that says all the Land Promises have been fulfilled in at least a spiritual way, but this does not exist in the New Testament.⁵

Paul Feinberg further explains:

Why should something that is clearly a matter of Old Testament revelation have to be *repeated* in the New Testament for it to have continuing validity? Should not the very opposite be the case? Should not the promises of the Old Testament be regarded as still in effect *unless the New Testament states otherwise?*⁶

Thus, it is incorrect to assume that God must declare something twice, both in the Old and New Testaments, for it to be valid. God need only articulate something once for it to be valid. If God declares His earthly kingdom promises in the Old Testament alone, that is enough to establish

their validity. This is especially true considering that is impossible for God to lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

THE NEW TESTAMENT'S FOCUS

Beyond this, why should we expect the New Testament to repeat exactly what was already revealed in the Old Testament? Would not such an expectation be an exercise in redundancy? If the New Testament simply repeated the very kingdom promises found in the Old Testament, why would we need a New Testament, or even an Old Testament for that matter? Moreover, there is a very good reason why the earthly kingdom promises do not receive the same expansive coverage that they have already received in the Old Testament. This reason has to do with the fact that in the New Testament, the Church is the center of salvation history and God's redemptive program. In the New Testament, God is not using Israel, as He did in Old Testament times and as He will use Israel again in the Tribulation period and millennial kingdom. Rather, in the New Testament age, the Church has become His vehicle to reach a lost and dying world. Since the Church is a mystery (Eph. 3:3, 9), or unrevealed in the prior age (Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26), it would stand to reason that the New Testament authors would spend the bulk of their writings explaining this new spiritual organism rather than merely repeating what the Old Testament had already revealed concerning national Israel. Price explains:

However, there are good reasons why the promise of Israel's national restoration, so often stated in the Old Testament, would not be repeated in the New Testament. First, the Old Testament, as the Bible of the early church, already contained sufficient instruction on the subject, and New Testament authors would have assumed this doctrine and expected their audiences to understand it from the Old Testament text. The frequent

citations and allusions to the Old Testament by New Testament authors demonstrate that the Old Testament had priority as the first authoritative revelation of God containing everything necessary to understand the divine program, which had its fulfillment in Christ...The New Testament was not written to replace the Old Testament, but to add new revelation that attended to the coming Messiah and the formation of the church. Therefore, the New Testament does not need to repeat Old Testament revelation concerning national Israel, but builds upon it by explaining the relationship between Israel and the church....While the New Testament does not change the original intent of its authors, who wrote about Israel's future restoration in the land, neither does it feel compelled to repeat what was already taught and understood in Scripture...Second, the New Testament does not put Israel in a central position, as does the Old Testament, because the church has become the central position in salvation history. The New Testament epistles are written for the instruction of the church, and therefore should not be expected to include discussions about Israel's restoration.⁷

THE NEW TESTAMENT'S REAFFIRMATION OF THE LAND PROMISES

Furthermore, the "kingdom now" theologian is wrong in assuming that the New Testament is completely silent on the subject of the restoration of Israel's terrestrial kingdom promises. While not emphasizing this truth to the same degree as is found in the pages of the Old Testament, the New Testament still affirms this truth in several places. For example, Luke 21:24 says, "...Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles *until* the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (italics added). The mere existence of the preposition "until" (*achri*) implies a time when Gentile dominion over Jerusalem will come to an end and Israel will be restored to her rightful place of rulership over the nations. Other verses revealing a future earthly kingdom will be highlighted in our next installment.

(To Be Continued...)

¹ E.R. Craven, "Excursus on the Basilea," in *Revelation of John*, ed. J. P. Lange (New York: Scribner, 1874), 95.

² Bruce K. Waltke, "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 273.

³ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/openletter.html>

⁴ Bruce Scott, "Christian Anti-Zionism: On the Wrong Side of History, Justice, and the Bible," *Israel My Glory* January/February 2014, 33.

⁵ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "Israel's Right to the Holy Land," online: <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/israels-right-to-promised-land>, accessed 4 February 2015, p. 21.

⁶ Paul D. Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 124.

⁷ J. Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy: A Definitive Look at Its Past, Present, and Future* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2005), 596.