

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD – Chapter 4

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM – With an Examination of DISPENSATIONALISM and the “Scofield Bible”

by [Philip Mauro](#): 1928

THE words of our chapter heading are the first words of the Gospel by Mark. They are enlightening words; and indeed they are quite sufficient in themselves to answer a question that confronts us at this point: When did the Gospel era begin? It is exceedingly important that we should have the right answer to that question; and we know where to seek it.

We have seen that the Bible distinguishes two great eras, and those two eras are closely related, the one to the other, though there are marked differences between them; the first being variously designated as, “the old covenant,” “the law and the prophets,” or simply “the law”; and the second being variously designated as, “the new covenant,” “the kingdom of God,” or simply “the gospel.” Our Scripture tells us we are now at the “beginning” of something; and that that something is “the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Could we have a plainer answer to our question?

And the passage goes on to tell what it was that marked “the beginning of the gospel”; and further to declare that the event that marked it was something that had been foretold in the Scriptures. For we read: “As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.” The reference is to Isaiah 40:3; and the prophecy was fulfilled, as this first chapter of Mark’s Gospel

declares, in the preaching and ministry of John the Baptist.

This was the very "beginning," the very first event of that long expected era, "THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD. But John's ministry was of short duration; for the enmity of the Jews was speedily aroused, because of the contradiction between his preaching and their expectations; and he was cast into prison. And then happened another event of transcendent interest; for the public ministry of Christ Himself (whose "way" John had been sent to "prepare") forthwith began. For it is written:

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (vv 14,15).

These words make it evident that "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," and "the gospel of the Kingdom of God" are one and the same. Moreover, the words, "The time is fulfilled" manifestly point to something of exceptional importance whereof promises had been given by the prophets. They refer, of course, to that promised era of victory over sin, that era of the bruising of the serpent's head, of the salvation of God for all men through the coming of the promised Deliverer, the era of the everlasting covenant and the sure mercies of David; in a word, they referred to the appointed time for the fulfilment of all the glorious things that God had spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. "The time" for the thing for which all believing hearts had looked and longed, was "fulfilled." So said Christ; and He also exhorted those who heard the announcement, to "repent, and believe the gospel." Note that the proclamation that the time was fulfilled He calls "the gospel."

But, in direct contradiction to these statements (which are as plain as is possible for anyone to make) the "Scofield Bible" asserts that the dispensation of the law, with its "pitiless

severity" and all the appalling characteristics of condemnation, death and the curse which that publication attributes to it, continued until the crucifixion of Christ; and it further asserts that "the Kingdom of God" (which that dispensational authority takes to mean the earthly kingdom of Jewish expectancy) was not "at hand," but was in the far distant future. Here then we have a very serious situation. For if this era of John the Baptist were not "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," then the plainest of plain Bible words, which have been understood for nineteen centuries in accordance with their apparent sense, have a meaning altogether different to what has always been supposed. And if the Kingdom our Lord said was then "at hand," was not at hand at all, but far away, then He certainly caused those who heard Him believingly and all who have listened to His words for nearly two thousand years, to believe what was not true.

We take up first the question:

What Kingdom was it that Christ said was at hand?

In considering this question let it be noted that there was a "Kingdom of God" then at hand; for Christ's servants shortly thereafter began to preach it as a present reality (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 20:25, etc.); and moreover, the apostle Paul, in his great Gospel letter, gave a definition of it (Rom. 14:17). Are there then two different Kingdoms of God; one of which was at hand, and one afar off in the future? Is God the author of confusion? And if there were two Kingdoms of God, one then close by and the other afar off, is it conceivable that the Kingdom of God which Christ said was then "at hand" was the one that was actually in the remote future?

How is it possible, I ask, for any who undertake to explain the Scriptures to arrive at the conclusion that the "Kingdom of God" which actually was "at hand," is not the "Kingdom of God" which the Lord said to be "at hand"; or, (to state it the

other way) that the "Kingdom of God" which the Lord publicly declared at hand, proved to be not at hand at all; whereas, marvelous to relate! another "Kingdom of God" whereof He made no mention, was at hand?

I have carefully examined the notes of the "Scofield Bible" in quest of the explanation of this. I find on one hand that no Scripture is cited to support the editor's view; for there is not one word in the Bible to the effect that the Kingdom announced by the Lord has been "postponed" or is "in abeyance." The Lord's own statement, from first to last, never modified, but proclaimed with ever increasing emphasis, was that the Kingdom was "at hand."

But the teaching of the Scofield Bible as to the Kingdom of God is founded nevertheless upon the baseless assumption that the prophets of Israel, in predicting the coming of the Messiah and of an era of blessing, salvation and victory for His people, were foretelling the restoration of the earthly greatness of the natural Israel. Therefore the editor of the publication, having committed himself thoroughly to this startlingly novel idea, and having lost sight of the many interpretations of those prophecies in the New Testament which show that they referred (in figurative language) to Redemption and to the Spiritual Kingdom based thereon, has attempted in his notes to make the New Testament agree with his mistaken theory.

But the attempt is an impossibility. In fact the editor himself abandons it completely after carrying it partly through the Gospel of Matthew. Anyone can see this for himself who will take a little pains to examine the matter. For we have to begin with the bold but unfounded assumption that the words "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of heaven" in our Lord's lips meant the earthly kingdom of Israel. Then we have the equally bold and equally unfounded assumption that the supposed "offer" of the earthly kingdom to the Jews of Christ's day was rejected by them, and that, as the result of

such supposed rejection, it was withdrawn and postponed; though there is no trace whatever in the inspired records of any such offer, or rejection, or withdrawal, or postponement; and though there is no hint that God's purpose to introduce the Kingdom which He had announced (and announced without any qualification whatever) was, or could have been, defeated or postponed by the action of the Jews of Christ's day.

In the "notes," the alleged rejection is located at Matthew 11: 20, as appears by the following statement:

"The Kingdom of heaven announced as 'at hand' by John the Baptist, by the King Himself, and by the twelve, and attested by mighty works, has been morally rejected."

Then the Lord's words recorded in Matthew 11:28,29, are called by the editor, "The new message of Jesus—not the kingdom but rest and service"; and this, we are told, is "the pivotal point in the ministry of Jesus," —that is to say the point at which He abandoned His message about the Kingdom's being at hand, and began to substitute a message of entirely different character.

I earnestly protest that these statements are wholly erroneous, and confidently maintain that the Lord had but one message, which was the gospel of God, and that the Kingdom which He preached while on earth and introduced when He sent the Holy Ghost from heaven, is the very "rest and service" which He offered and still offers to all the weary and heavy laden ones.

Following this is a note (on Mat. 12:46) which asserts that our Lord, "rejected by Israel," now intimates the formation of the "new family of faith." But the fact is that the "new family"—composed of the children of His Father in heaven—had been previously addressed at length and in the most precise terms as to their relationship with God, in the Sermon on the Mount. But inasmuch as it would upset the editor's theory

completely to find any hint of the "new family" in that part of Matthew, he firmly closes his eyes to the conspicuous presentation of it in those chapters, and locates the first "intimation" of it in chapter 12. For it is as plain to any babe in Christ as the sun in the sky at noonday, that in the Sermon on the Mount God, the "Father in heaven," is speaking to His own "children" on earth, by the lips of His own Son. But that fact, so vital to all the household of God, would, if acknowledged, completely destroy the editor's theory, so he ignores and even contradicts it.

In order to obtain an appearance of support to his views, the editor states in a note on the Lord's interview with the woman of Syrophenicia, (Mat. 15:21), that "For the first time the rejected Son of David ministers to a Gentile." This is necessary to the theory we are examining; for if Christ should be found ministering to a Gentile prior to Matthew 11, that action on His part would destroy the "Jewish" and "legal" character which the editor imputes to that part of the Lord's ministry; and would demolish the theory completely. Now is it possible then that the editor and associate editors and all who have been helping to correct the errors of his edition for more than a score of years, have been blinded to the fact that the Lord healed the centurion's servant, as recorded in Matthew 8:5-10, and in connection therewith used those remarkable words, "Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith no not in Israel"? And how can we account for the failure on the part of all those learned men to observe the record in Matthew 4:24 that the fame of Jesus went throughout all Syria, and they brought to Him all sick people, and He healed them? And for their failure to observe also that, even before the Lord began to preach publicly in Galilee, He ministered and revealed Himself as "Christ" to the woman of Samaria, and that many of the Samaritans believed on Him? (John 4).

These are but a few of many instances which show that the

advocates of the postponement theory are mysteriously blinded to the plainest facts when those facts are in conflict with that theory; while on the other hand they claim the ability to "see" things in the text of Scripture which support their theory, although others are utterly unable to find a trace of them. But, without dwelling upon this, I would ask particular attention to the fact that, even according to the kind of proof by which our friends seek to maintain their theory, the facts concerning the centurion's servant and the Lord's personal ministry of salvation (the "living water") to the Samaritans, refute that theory completely.

Pursuing the notes of the aforesaid "Reference Bible" we come to the very important chapter 16 of Matthew's Gospel, where the "church" is first mentioned by name; and there, as a comment on verse 20, in which the Lord charged His disciples "that they should tell no man that He Jesus was the Christ" (Gr.), is the following note:

"The disciples had been proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, i.e. the covenanted King of a kingdom covenanted to the Jews and 'at hand.' The church on the contrary must be built on the testimony to Him as crucified, risen from the dead, ascended and made Head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:20-23). The former testimony was ended; the new testimony was not yet ready etc." (*italics are mine*).

I ask special attention to these statements, for they are of capital importance; and they embody errors of a very serious character; though happily the errors are clearly to be seen in the light of the Scripture.

1. To begin with the disciples had not been "proclaiming Jesus as the Christ," and the text to which this grievously misleading note is appended makes that fact startlingly clear. Indeed the note completely contradicts and falsifies the text, as anyone with but slight attention can see plainly. For the whole point of the Lord's words at Caesarea Philippi depends

upon the fact that the disciples at last had become aware, through the revelation of God the Father, that He, Jesus, was the Christ. If they had been proclaiming Him, or if He had been proclaiming Himself in their hearing, as "the Christ the covenanted King," and had been offering to the Jews the Kingdom they were expecting, what point would there have been to His question, "But whom say ye that I am?" or to His words to Simon (when the latter made the great confession "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"), that "flesh and blood" had not revealed this to him, but "My Father Who is in heaven"? Plainly it is impossible that He should have uttered those words if the statements of Dr. Scofield's note were true.

Let it not be forgotten that, according to the theory we are examining, the Lord had been preached all over the land as the Christ of God, come to set up the earthly throne of David. Yet His own question "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man am?" and the reply of the apostles, show plainly that He was practically unknown. For if He had announced Himself as Christ the King, and had been so proclaimed by His apostles, He could not have asked that question. Nor could they in that case, have said: "Some say Thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets." And furthermore, if He had been publicly proclaimed as "Christ the King" He could not have charged them to tell no man that He was the Christ.

There is no ground whatever for such a misstatement; for the plain facts are that the Lord had never proclaimed Himself as Christ the King. His way had always been to let His works speak for Him (Mat. 11:4,5; John 5:36; 10:25, etc.) The name by which He almost invariably called Himself was "The Son of man," a name which connects Him with Gentiles as much as with Jews.

When the Lord crossed the sea with the disciples after feeding the five thousand, and stilled the wind and waves by His Word,

they wondered what manner of man He was; and it is recorded in Mark 6:52, that "they considered not the miracle of the loaves; for their heart was hardened"; (literally the verse reads "they understood not by the loaves"); or in other words the great truth of His Messiahship was not yet apprehended by them. Still later, after feeding the four thousand, He had occasion again to rebuke them, saying: "Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes see ye not, and ears hear ye not?" And He concludes the long list of reproachful questions with the pointed one: "How is it that ye do not understand?" (Mk. 8:14;2I).

From first to last then it is evident that He could not permit Himself to be proclaimed as Christ the King, until He had endured the appointed "sufferings of Christ." For whatever the "throne" which was promised to Him, whether heavenly or earthly, the only pathway to it lay through the predicted sufferings and death that awaited Him. The concurrent testimony of all the Scriptures is that the prophecies concerning David's promised Son were to be fulfilled only in resurrection. (See for example Acts 2:29-32; and 13:22-24 and 32-34). His "Father's business" upon which He had come was not at all in connection with the earthly expectations of Israel, but was for the Redemption of the whole world, and the introduction of a spiritual Kingdom composed of redeemed sinners out of every nation under heaven.

2. Consider now the following: statement of the above quoted note: "The former testimony was ended, the new testimony was not yet ready." I have shown that what the editor takes to be "the former testimony," namely the testimony of Christ as King Who had come to set up the earthly kingdom, which testimony he says was "ended" had not been begun up to that time; for the apostles themselves had just apprehended that He was the Christ. It is also clear that, in the Divine program (which of course was perfectly carried out) the Lord Jesus was not to be preached as "the Christ" until He was risen from the dead and

enthroned in heaven. This passage therefore is quite sufficient in itself to settle the whole question as to what sort of a "Kingdom" the Lord and His forerunner had announced. The "Christ" or "Messiah" was, according to Psalm 2, the promised King of Israel. If therefore the Lord forbade His disciples to announce Him as "the Christ," He in effect forbade them to announce Him as the King of Israel. The Scripture will be searched in vain for any occasion when they proclaimed Him as either Christ or King before He rose from the dead. In fact, before Pentecost they did not preach the Lord Jesus—the Person—at all, but only announced the nearness of the Kingdom.

But regardless of what was meant by "the Kingdom of heaven" and "Kingdom of God," the fact is that, instead of the preaching of the Kingdom being "ended" at this point, as the theory demands and as the Scofield Bible dogmatically asserts, the very same proclamation continued right on to the end of the Lord's earthly ministry, not only with undiminished energy, but even with increased diligence. For, on His last journey to Jerusalem, during which He told His disciples again and again that He was about to be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes, and be crucified, and would rise again from the dead the third day, He appointed "other seventy," in addition to the original twelve, and set them forth to proclaim the Kingdom of God as at hand. (See for example Luke 18:31-34, and notice that subject of the Lord's discourse is the Kingdom of God. Ch. 16:16; 17:20:18:16-30).

The appointment of those "other seventy also" is recorded in Luke 10:1-9, the sending forth of the twelve being mentioned in chapter 9, before the Transfiguration.

The sending of the seventy, with identically the same instructions and with identically the same announcement previously given to the twelve, indicates that the time was getting so short for the preliminary proclamation of the Kingdom (for the Passover at which the Lord was to be slain

was but a few weeks off, they being then on the way to Jerusalem); that many additional messengers were needed to cover the ground. It shows also that the announcement of the Kingdom of God as 'at hand' went side by side with the Lord's repeated explanation to His own disciples of what was to befall Him at Jerusalem; and this is proof that the Kingdom He had proclaimed awaited only His approaching death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement in heaven as "King of Glory," in fulfilment of Psalms 2, 14, and 110. When He ascended "the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1), then the "Kingdom of the heavens" began.

Those who hold the postponement theory realize that the announcement of Christ's sufferings and death could not possibly be coupled with that of an earthly kingdom. Hence our friends have been sorely troubled by John the Baptist's proclamation of Jesus as the Lamb of God Which taketh away the sin of the world; since they are utterly unable to explain that proclamation consistently with their theory. For that theory demands that when Christ began to tell the disciples of His approaching death He should cease to proclaim the Kingdom. If, however, His death and resurrection were necessary to the introduction of the Kingdom He had been announcing, then we should expect to find His references thereto accompanied by an even more intense preaching of the Kingdom; and that is precisely what we do find.

The instructions given to the seventy were that they should heal the sick, and preach, saying: "The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Lu. 10:9); and it should be observed that the words "is come nigh," are precisely the same in the original as the words "is at hand." So the announcement of these seventy was identical with that of the Lord Himself as recorded in Mark 1:15. And not only so: but there was an added emphasis to the announcement as thus commanded by the Lord at the very end of His ministry; for He instructed the seventy that in any city which received them not they were to go out

into the streets and say: "Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you; notwithstanding be ye sure of this that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Lu. 10:9-11).

According to the postponement theory, when the kingdom proclaimed by the Lord was rejected by the Jews, it was forthwith, and for that reason, "withdrawn" and "postponed." But, according to the Lord's own word, the messengers were to say to any cities which rejected the message, "Notwithstanding (your rejection) be ye sure of this, that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." So this Scripture demolishes the theory completely.

We see then that, according to Scripture, the Lord proclaimed the Kingdom of God as "at hand" from the very beginning to the very end of His public ministry; and that, so far from abandoning the proclamation, He gave it a wider publicity toward the end. The notes of the "Scofield Bible" flatly contradict this clear record, and say that the testimony of the kingdom was ended about the time of the beheading of John the Baptist. And what is most remarkable is the fact that long after the time when, according to the "Scofield Bible," the announcement of the kingdom ceased, the Lord's messengers were, by His special command, making that very announcement everywhere with the added words "Be ye sure of this." We see then that the rejection of the message by the Jews was not to change the declared purpose of God; and how could anyone have supposed for a moment that it would? Indeed, the hatred and opposition of the Jews did but serve to accomplish the eternal purpose of God: and their attention was called to that fact by the apostle Peter, who, after accusing them of having "killed the Prince of Life," went on to say: "But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled" (Acts 3:13-18).

Here again is a Scripture which tells plainly what was the great topic of all the prophets of God; and which also tells

plainly that it was not the restoration of the Jewish nation, but the sufferings of Christ and the eternal and spiritual kingdom, "the Kingdom which cannot be shaken," that was to be founded thereon.