

THE KINGDOM "AT HAND." THE ORDER OF REVELATION – Chapter 7

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

by [Philip Mauro](#): 1928

THE notes of the Scofield Bible on the subjects of the Kingdom leave us at Matthew 16 with the statement that the old testimony was ended and the new not yet ready. There the all-important subject of the Kingdom was dropped, so far as the notes are concerned, and our Lord is left without any message at all. We suspect the reason for this is that human ingenuity could go no further. For how, on the editor's theory, could the words of Mark I: I– "The beginning of the gospel o[Jesus Christ the Son of God" –be explained? Or the Lord's words, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14,15)? Or the fact that Paul everywhere "preached the kingdom of God," and that he witnessed "both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 20:25; 26:22)? Or the fact that God has "translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13)? It is only because of the impossibility of making these and other important Scripture fit in with the editor's theory that we can explain the remarkable fact that he has passed them by without a word of comment. The users of this edition must have wondered at this strange silence.

Those readers must also have been puzzled and disappointed at the notes on Acts 1:3-6. In the text we have the important statement that the Lord, after His resurrection, was seen of the apostles forty days, during which He was "speaking of

things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." This, of course, could only mean that He was instructing them concerning the work of that Kingdom in which they were to serve Him so soon as they should receive power through the coming of the Holy Spirit, Whom He at that very time promised to send upon them. For why should the Lord be giving them at that time directions concerning a kingdom which had been withdrawn and postponed? Surely an explanation is demanded; but all that is offered in the note is this singular comment: "doubtless, according to His custom (Luke. 24: 27,32,44,45) teaching them out of the Scriptures." Obviously this comment does not explain the text, but contradicts it. The passage itself needs no explanation, for it is transparently clear. But this is one of "the hard places" for the editor's theory, which goes to pieces on this one passage. "Helps" indeed are needed; but the note merely exposes the erroneous nature of the theory. If the lord was "teaching them out of the Scriptures," and not giving them fresh revelations and instructions, then certainly "the Scriptures" from which He was "teaching them" must have had to do with the Kingdom of God; for we have the express statement of verse 3 that that is what He was instructing them about. And since the very Scriptures which the editor cites in the above note had to do with the Lord's sufferings and death and resurrection, as declared in Luke XXIV, then the Lord's death and resurrection, and also the coming of the Holy Spirit, must needs have preceded the Kingdom of God. That is indeed the simple truth of the matter, and every pertinent Scripture is in perfect agreement therewith. Hence the Kingdom of God preached by the Lord from the beginning of His ministry could not have been the restoring of the earthly kingdom of Israel.

The notes to which we have referred show very plainly just where the editor has missed his way in attempting to trace the order of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and promise. The editor comes to the New Testament with the very novel and radical "theological concept and presupposition" that the Kingdom or era of blessing foretold by the prophets

of Israel was the earthly Kingdom of Jewish expectancy; and that the appointed time for it in God's plan of the ages, was at the first coming of Christ. For the editor says: "When Christ appeared to the Jewish people, the next thing, in the order of revelation as it then stood, should have been the setting up of the Davidic kingdom (Mat. 4:17)." This is a crucial statement: but it is very easy to show that it is quite erroneous. We have only to look back as far as the last verses of the Old Testament to see that "the next thing in the order of revelation as it then stood" was the ministry of a special messenger who should prepare the way of the Lord by turning many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, lest He should come and "smite the earth with a curse." We know, moreover, that the turning of many Israelites to the Lord is exactly what did take place (Lu. 1:13-17); and we know also that, but for John's Elijah-like ministry, the earth would have been smitten with a curse (Mal. 4:6). John's ministry was therefore indispensably necessary as an introduction to the predicted era of blessing, which era he announced when he said: "the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

What kingdom then was it that the Lord Himself thus proclaimed as "at hand," and which He called "the Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God"? Did the Lord from heaven come personally to proclaim with His own lips a Kingdom "at hand" which was not at hand? Did He call upon those who heard Him to "believe" what was not true? And did those who did believe Him have to learn later on that they had been deceived, and that the Kingdom which He positively declared to be at hand was postponed? They who hold with the editor of the "Scofield" Bible would have to say "Yes" to these questions. For though there was a Kingdom then at hand, and though its divinely given name is "the Kingdom of God" (Acts 8:12; Rom. 14:17, etc.), these modern teachers tell us that the Kingdom of God which was at hand is not the Kingdom of God which the Lord, Who knoweth all things and Who cannot lie, said to be at hand: but that the Kingdom of God which He positively declared as at

hand, was some other "Kingdom of God" which was not at hand at all. Is it possible, I ask in all seriousness, to do greater violence than this to the statements of the Lord?

But let us see how this simple and transparently clear announcement of the Lord is made to square with the editor's novel doctrine; for we have here an exceedingly interesting and instructive example of the methods by which the postponement theory is upheld. For, as we shall now see, it was needful to the maintenance of that theory, that the meaning of a common Bible phrase should be completely changed; and accordingly the needed change is wrought through the instrumentality of one of the editor's notes, which contains the following assertion:

"'At hand' is never a positive affirmation that the person or thing said to be 'at hand' will immediately appear, but only that no known or predicted event must intervene. When Christ appeared to the Jewish people, the next thing in the order of revelation as it then stood should have been the setting up of the Davidic kingdom" (*italics ours*).

Is any proof offered in support of this statement? Not a word; though if true it would be easy to establish it by citing a few passages which would show the Biblical usage of the phrase. Now, what are the facts as to the usage of this phrase in the New Testament? The word here used by our Lord and here translated "at hand" is used by Himself and by the inspired writers of the Gospels and Acts over fifty times, and in every instance it is just what the editor says it never is namely, a "positive affirmation" that the person or thing said to be "at hand" was at hand. In other words, the statement of the editor is exactly the reverse of the truth. This is easily shown.

The word referred to is usually translated "is (or is come) near, or nigh"; and we will give a few of the more than fifty occurrences of that word in the Gospels and Acts.

Mat. 21:1 "When they drew nigh unto Jerusalem." This means that they were nigh to Jerusalem; and so in every other case.

21:34 "When the time of the fruit drew nigh."

24:32 "Ye know that summer is nigh"

24:33 "When ye shall see these things, know that it is near."

Mk. 2: 4 "Could not come nigh unto Him for the press.

Lu. 7:12 "When He came nigh to the gate."

15:1 "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him."

18:35 "As He was come nigh unto Jericho."

19:11 "because He was nigh to Jerusalem."

22:1 "The feast of unleavened bread drew nigh ."

22:47 "Judas drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him."

John 2:13 "The Jews' passover was at hand."

6:4 "A feast of the Jews was nigh."

7:2 "The Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand."

6:19 "And drew nigh unto the ship."

It is evident that in all these cases the word which our Lord used repeatedly in proclaiming the Kingdom of God as "at hand," means close by, near, about to come or be reached. In fact it is the most appropriate word that could be chosen for expressing the very idea for which the editor says it is never used.

On several occasions in speaking of the Kingdom of God the Lord used even a stronger word than "is at hand." Thus, in

Matthew 12:28 He said: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you. Here the Lord declared that the Kingdom was actually present. So likewise in Luke 17:20,21 He said (speaking to the Pharisees): "For behold, the Kingdom of God is within (i.e. in the midst of) you." In both these cases He referred to Himself as constituting God's Kingdom at that time; that is to say, He Himself was the realm in which God's will was being done in the power of the Holy Ghost. Still later, again speaking to the Pharisees, and long after the kingdom had been, on the editor's theory, withdrawn, the Lord said: "But woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye shut up the Kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go" (Mat. 23:13).

In the foregoing comments we have referred only to the use of the expressions "at hand" and "come nigh" in the Gospels; for it is in them that the announcement of the era which actually was at hand would be found. It is attempted sometimes to force a different meaning on the words "at hand" (or rather to reverse their meaning completely) because of the fact that in Romans 13:12 Paul says, "the day is at hand," and in Philippians 4:5 he says "the Lord is at hand." It is assumed, of course, that both these statements refer to the second coming of Christ. But it seems quite clear that "the day" to which Paul refers is the day that had dawned then, i.e. at the first coming of Christ. For he says it is "now high time to awake out of sleep"; and because the day has dawned he exhorts us to cast off the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light. We believe the sense is the same as in 1 John 2:8, "the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (Gr.).

In Philippians 4:5 there is no reference to the Lord's coming, but to the fact that He is always "near" to supply the needs of His people.

In the foot-note last quoted above, is a crucial statement the

settlement of which will decide the whole matter in dispute. The assertion is that "When Christ appeared to the Jewish people, the next thing, in the order of revelation as it then stood, should have been the setting up of the Davidic kingdom." Again we call attention to the absence of any attempt whatever to support this assertion by proof; and also to the implication that the "order of revelation" is a changeable thing. For it is plainly implied that the order of revelation might be something different at another time.

"As it then stood" the next thing was "the Davidic Kingdom"—at least so says the editor. But if so, what prevented the order of Divine revelation from proceeding? If the Davidic kingdom was then in order in God's plan, what prevented its coming into existence? According to the same authority (for no other is cited), the explanation is that the Jews of Christ's day would not accept it.

This is stupefying. Is the order of revelation of God's purposes such an uncertain thing that the opposition of carnal men can set it aside? If, when God's "set time" (the order of revelation), had come, the will of man could put off the event for thousands of years, what certainty is there in any promise or prophecy?

God has given His people, through Moses, a test whereby a true prophet should be known, saying: "If the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously" (Deut. 18:22). According to this test, what do those who hold the postponement theory make of the Lord's prophecy "the kingdom of God is at hand," when they say that the kingdom of which the Lord spoke was postponed because of its (supposed) rejection by the Jews?

Finally we come to the assertion (which is at the very foundation of the postponement theory), that "the Davidic Kingdom," meaning thereby the earthly Kingdom the Jews were

expecting, was the next thing in order at the time of the lord's first coming. This statement we wish to bring in the most definite way to the test of Scripture.

It would be, of course, a task of great magnitude to review the Old Testament prophecies and show the various subjects they embrace, and their sequence—where any sequence can be discerned. But our object can be accomplished without any such laborious undertaking. For we have in the New Testament certain inspired summaries of the prophecies, by which the editor's statement can be tested. To these we will make our appeal.

For example, in I Peter 1:10-12 we have a general summing up of what the prophets foretold; and this will answer perfectly our purpose.

In the first place, the subject of the prophecies is divided by the apostle Peter into two great parts, (1) "the sufferings of the Christ," and (2) "the glories that should follow." So we have here not only the grand subject of the prophecies, in its two divisions, but we have "the order of revelation as it then stood"; for we are told precisely that "the glories" (plural in the original) were to follow the sufferings. Inasmuch then as the Throne is the prominent feature of "the glories" of the Christ, it is clear that the Throne was not "the next thing in order."

But that is not all. For the Scripture last cited tells us plainly that the theme of the prophets was—not the earthly kingdom, which is not referred to or hinted at in this summary, but the "salvation" and the "Grace" which were to come unto us. This is an exceedingly important statement, and when its meaning (which is transparently plain) is grasped, it is seen to be conclusive of the question we are now examining.

And not only so, but it was revealed to those prophets that the things they foretold were ministered "not unto themselves,

but unto us"; and the passage tells further that the very same things which the prophets foretold are what "are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven."

Thus we have it here declared in the plainest words that the general theme of the prophets is the same as that of the preachers of the gospel; that what the prophets of old predicted is exactly what the evangelists now preach! Thus we learn that the "gospel"—that is to say God's message of grace for all the world—was the prominent subject of the Old Testament prophecy, and was "next in order" to "follow" the sufferings of Christ, which were immediately due for fulfillment when He came into the world.

Again, in addressing the company of Gentiles assembled in the home of Cornelius, the apostle gives a concise summary of the message which God had sent unto the children of Israel, "which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached" (cf. Mark 1:4,14); and that message (or "word") consisted—not in preaching the earthly kingdom, but in "preaching peace through Jesus Christ" (Acts 10: 36,37).

The testimony of Paul agrees perfectly with this. His preaching and writing were based firmly upon the prophets: and when he speaks of what was "promised afore," it is not the earthly kingdom, but "the gospel of God concerning His Son." This, says the apostle, is what "He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:1-3). Moreover, the theme of the Epistle to the Romans is the righteousness of God in justifying believing sinners; and this (not the earthly kingdom at all) is what the apostle says expressly was "witnessed by the law and the prophets" (Rom. 3:21). Paul also in his defense of his ministry before Herod Agrippa testified that, from the beginning of his commission as a servant of Christ unto that very day, he had continued "witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things

than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26:22). This is another positive assertion that the evangelists now preach exactly what the prophets foretold.

The witness of "all the prophets" is also stated by Peter in the house of Cornelius in a very familiar verse: "To Him (Christ) give all the prophets witness, that through His Name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins"(Acts 10:43).

The words of Zacharias, spoken before the Lord was born, are likewise very clear, and are decisive of the matter in dispute. The whole prophecy (Luke 1:67-79) should be read attentively: but for our immediate purpose it is enough to quote the opening words, which tell clearly what the new dispensation was to be—namely one of Redemption and Salvation—and tell also what it was that God had spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets "since the world began," that is, from a time long before there was any earthly nation of Israel:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of Salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began."

See also the concluding verses (77-79) which tell specifically what the coming "Salvation" was—"the remission of sins," "light" to them in darkness and the shadow of death, and a "way of peace."

Other New Testament summaries of the prophecies might be referred to, but we will only cite in conclusion the Lord's own words recorded in the last chapter of Luke. There we find His explanations to the two disciples with whom He walked and talked by the way, and whom He reproved for not believing "all that the prophets have spoken" (ver. 25). The words which

follow make it clear that the theme of the prophets was, just as we saw from I Peter, "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." For the Lord said: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" And that such was necessary He proceeded to prove. For "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself." Clearly then, the two great divisions of the prophetic Scriptures were Christ's sufferings and death on earth, and His glory as a Man in Heaven. (See John 12:23: 13:32; 17:5: Acts 2:33: 4: 13; I Tim. 3: 16: Heb. 2:9 etc.). In other words, the main theme of the prophets, when spiritually discerned is that which is fulfilled and being fulfilled through Jesus Christ, during this present age.

The same order of fulfilment of prophecy appears in the words of the Lord recorded in the last part of the same chapter (Luke 24:44-49), that order being, first His own sufferings, then His resurrection and the glory into which He was about to enter in heaven, and then the coming of the Holy Ghost and the preaching of the gospel among all nations. We quote the words, which are so clear as to need no comment:

"And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved (i.e. was necessary for) Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

In these words we have the Lord's own explanation of "the order of revelation as it then stood" (and as of course it has always stood): and we see that, in the progress of great events as declared by Him Who is both the Subject and the Fulfiller of all the prophecies, the earthly kingdom had no place at all among the purposes He had come to accomplish.