

Thy Kingdom Come! (Part One)

by Staff

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Not long ago, as summer vacation time began to wind down, I was walking on our local beach one morning, when I noticed that some children had been playing there. With their basic "construction materials" of wet sand and pebbles, they had built a dam—for the obvious purpose of trying to block the water of a little rivulet from making its way down to the ocean.

Because of the uneven terrain of our local beach, hollows have been eroded into the sand. When the tide is out, the rivulet normally flows, first into one hollow, creating a small lake, then into a second hollow, making another small lake, before emptying into the ocean itself.

It was evident that the children's efforts had been in vain. Although they had made a valiant attempt to build the sturdiest dam that they were able, the water of the rivulet had won the day. Some of its water had incessantly washed against the dam, gradually eroding away the sand "mortar" that held the pebbles together, and some of the water had simply rerouted and flowed around the dam.

Then the tide came in! The mighty waves of the ocean first swallowed up the second "lake." As it progressed, it consumed the first "lake" and then the dam. Finally, it completely swallowed up the beach part of the rivulet itself.

In subsequent visits, I noticed that the pebbles of the dam were gradually being pulled apart by the rivulet and the ocean tides—to the point where, a few weeks later, not even a trace remains of the children's dam ever having existed.

As I sat and watched this day after day, I began meditating on what was happening here, forming a picture in my mind of:

- » The water of the rivulet symbolizing time and God's children marching inexorably on towards the end of this age.
- » The first "lake" symbolizing the time of the prophesied Place of Safety.
- » The second "lake" symbolizing the thousand years of the Millennium.
- » The huge ocean symbolizing the wonderful eternity of God's Kingdom.
- » Finally, although the youthful dam-builders are, of course, relatively innocent, their sand-and-pebble barrier symbolized, in my mind, the vain attempts of Satan, his demons, and his human supporters trying to prevent the inexorable progress—of time and of God's people—in their journey toward God's Kingdom.

We can find encouragement in being reminded from God's Holy Word that, no matter what Satan *or* his demons *or* his human allies do to try to stop them, the resurrections, the return of Jesus Christ, and God's Kingdom *will* come!

The Kingdom of God has both a present and a future aspect. Believe it or not, it also has a *past* aspect! We need to consider these three aspects.

God's Kingdom Is Within Us *NOW*!

First, right from the beginning, Satan and his cohorts have partially failed in their attempts to thwart the coming of God's Kingdom. How? Why? Because God's Kingdom has already partially come with the arrival of the human Jesus Christ:

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

This raises the frequently asked question: Did Jesus really mean "within you"? Or did He mean "among you"? Whichever one of these options Jesus meant—or even both of them—does not negate the facts that:

- » The Kingdom of God certainly *did* reside in the Person of the human Jesus Christ.
- » God's Kingdom certainly *does* reside today in His brothers and sisters—the members of His church—by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.
- » The *fullness* of God's Kingdom must come, completely, at "the fullness of times," which will be at some time in the future: ". . . that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him" (Ephesians 1:10).

We know that the Kingdom of God was inherent *within* the human Jesus; and therefore, if we are now in Him by His Spirit dwelling in us, then the Kingdom is inherent within us too.

Notice, too, Ephesians 1:11 because it dovetails nicely with some concepts we will consider shortly, those of our inheritance and predestination: "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

Actually, the "within you or among you" argument is something of a moot point. Why? Because God's Kingdom certainly did not originate with the conception or birth of the human Jesus. Rather, it was actually originated and prepared *millennia* prior to Jesus' human lifetime. As the Logos, He and God the Father began preparing their Kingdom way back in prehistory, at the time God's Word calls "the foundation of the world."

Jesus says in Matthew 25:34: "Then the King [Jesus Christ] will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Note the mention of the word "inherit" in this context. However, before considering the inheritance, we should read another verse showing that God's Kingdom was planned "from the foundation of the world": "For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: 'So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest,"' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Hebrews 4:3).

God the Father and Jesus had completed the major part of their preparation work for their Kingdom eons ago!

God's Kingdom Is Coming!

So we have seen that the Kingdom of God has both a past-tense, historic aspect—we could actually call it a "*prehistoric* aspect"—and a present-tense aspect! It was in the human Jesus Christ through the indwelling in Him of an unlimited portion of the Holy Spirit (John 3:34), and it is in Jesus' brothers and sisters through a smaller portion—an earnest or down payment—of that same Spirit (II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5).

The present-tense aspect for God's human children is inextricably associated with both the past-tense and future-tense aspects in that, through the indwelling of that same Holy Spirit that was in the human Jesus, we are heirs of the riches of God the Father. Recall Ephesians 1:10-11 (KJV):

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times [referring to a future time] he [God the Father] might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him [Christ]: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance.

. . .

Mark it well: "we *have* obtained" it. That is past tense and therefore means that we have this inheritance now, and that our ownership of the inheritance is present tense! The inheritance and its associated blessings are as good as ours *now*. Of course, we must still endure and overcome!

. . . being predestined [again, the pre-history part of the promise] according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard [past tense] the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed [past tense] with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until the [future] redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:11-14)

At the time of the complete fulfillment of this redemption, "the earnest of our inheritance" will blossom into its entire fullness. What will we be heirs of? What will we inherit?

» The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are [present tense] children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:16-17)

» And if you are Christ's, then you are [present tense] Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:29)

» That having been justified [past tense] by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:7)

» Are [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)

The English words "will inherit," as translated here in Hebrews 1:14 from the Greek verb *méllontas*, make it sound as if it is in the future tense. Grammatically, however, it is actually "active present" tense in the Greek, and therefore it might be better rendered as "those who *are inheriting* salvation." Nevertheless, even with human inheritances, the entirety of the inheritance does not come immediately upon an individual becoming an heir, as the actual receipt of its benefits comes later (Hebrews 9:16).

Being heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, the total inheritance has not yet been totally given to us. So far, we have received just an earnest—a down payment—of the fullness of His Holy Spirit and the fullness of the associated blessings that we will receive in the future. Further, we have God's unbreakable promise that we will receive our full inheritance when the time comes: "Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (Hebrews 6:17).

Again, what exactly is the inheritance? What is promised to us? The apostle James makes it clear: "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5). As well as being an indescribable inheritance, God's Kingdom is also a firm promise to us from God. He does not break His promises!

God's people were chosen before the foundation of the world to receive this priceless inheritance and promise. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:3-4:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He [the Father] chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

This is exactly what the term "predestination" refers to!

Of course, as these verses clearly state, in order to receive this inheritance we must overcome and endure to the end! The apostle says that we must be holy and without blame; that is, we must maintain our holiness and blamelessness until the end, staying well away from all unrighteousness and works of the flesh.

Does this mean that God's promises are conditional on an individual basis and depend on what we *do* with them? Or is it a case of "once saved, always saved"? Has Christ done it all for us? Or does it matter what *we* do for the remainder of our Christian lives? Part Two will answer these questions.