

A STUDY of

The Kingdom of the Heavens

and Related Subjects

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A Classification of New Testament Passages in Reference to the Kingdom

REFERENCES TO "The KINGDOM of the HEAVENS"		Synonymous Passages where "Kingdom of God" is used	
MATT.		MARK	LUKE
3:2	Repeat for the ~ is at hand		
4:23	Jesus went preaching the gospel of the kingdom (& 9:35)		8:1;9:11;16:16
4:17	Jesus preached, Repent for the ~ is at hand	1:14-15	4:43
5:3	Blessed the poor in spirit, for theirs is ~		6:20
5:10	Blessed the persecuted for righteousness ...		
5:19	Whoso shall do and teach ... great in ~		
5:20	Except righteousness exceed that of Scribes and Pharisees		
7:21	Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into ~		
8:11	Shall sit down with Abraham in ~		13:28-29; 14:15
10:7	Go, preach, saying the ~ is at hand		9:2
11:11	He that is least in ~ is greater than he		7:28
11:12	~ suffereth violence		
13:11	To know the mysteries of ~	4:11	8:10
13:18	When any one heareth the word of the kingdom		
13:24	~ is likened unto a man which sowed good seed		
13:31	~ is likened unto a grain of mustard seed	4:30	13:18-19
13:33	~ is like unto leaven		13:20-21
13:38	The good seed are the children of the kingdom		
13:41	The Son of Man shall ... gather out of His kingdom ¹		
13:44	~ is like unto treasure		
13:45	~ is like a merchantman seeking goodly pearls		
13:47	~ is like a net		
13:52	Every scribe instructed unto ~		
18:19	I will give to thee the keys of ~		
18:1	Who is greatest in the...		
18:3	Except ye become converted ...ye shall not enter ~		
18:23	~ is likened unto a certain king		
19:12	Eunuchs for ~ sake		
19:14	Little children, for of such is ~	10:14	18:16
19:23	A rich man shall hardly enter into ~		
19:24	Easier... than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God	10:23,25	18:24-25
20:1	~ is like unto a man an householder		
22:2	~ is like unto a certain king		
23:13	For ye shut up ~ against men		
23:1	Then shall ~ be likened unto ten virgins		
25:14	~ is as a man travelling into a far country		

¹ In this passage the kingdom of heaven is plainly spoken of as the kingdom of the Son of Man; with this link 16:28, "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom;" this is spoken of as "the kingdom of God come with power" in Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27. Thus these expressions are made synonymous. This warrants the grouping under this association of terms those passages which refer to the kingdom in the coming dispensation and future glory, and spoken of as the kingdom of the Son. These passages are given in the following list.

Matt.19:28	The Son of Man shall aft in the throne of His glory, and ye... on twelve thrones...
Matt.20:21	One on the right hand and the other on the left in Thy kingdom
Mark 8:38	The Son of Man...cometh in the glory of His Father with holy angels (see Matt.25:31).
Luke 1:33	And of His kingdom there shall be no end (see v.32 and Mark 11:10).
Luke 19:12	Nobleman went to receive for himself a kingdom.
Luke 19:18	When he was returned, having received the kingdom
Luke 22: 29	I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me.
Luke 22: 30	That ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones...
Luke 23:42	Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom
John 18:36	My kingdom is not of this world... My kingdom is not from hence.
1 Cor.15:24	When He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father.
2 Tim.4:1	Shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.
2 Tim.4:18	And will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom.
Rev.5:21	To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne.
Rev.20:4	And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

**The FOLLOWING PASSAGES are of FUTURE APPLICATION,
and so RELATE to the FOREGOING:**

Matt.24:14	This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to all nations.
Acts 1:8	Is it at this time that Thou restorest the kingdom to Israel?
Acts 3:20,21	... the restoring of all things of which God has spoken...

**In the light of this we may link with this Aspect of the kingdom all the
PROPHETIC TESTIMONY of the OLD TESTAMENT in regard to the
KINGDOM**

**The FOLLOWING PASSAGES, MENTIONING the KINGDOM as that of the
SON, have a PRESENT as well as FUTURE APPLICATION**

Eph.5:5	No whoremonger... hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God.
Col.1:13	Hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.
2 Pet.1:11	Abundant entrance ministered into everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
Rev.1:9	Companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.
Heb.1:8	A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom.

THIS GIVES ITS GENERAL CHARACTER

All Other REFERENCES to KINGDOM of GOD		SOME SYNONYMOUS OR RELATED PASSAGES
Matt.6:33	Seek ye first the kingdom of God	Luke 12:30-32
Matt.12:28	The ~ is come unto you	Note connection with the Father in these verses, and link with this
Matt.21:31	The harlots go into ~ before you	Matt.6:10; Lk.11:2; Matt.13:43;
Matt.21:43	~ shall be taken from you	26:29 Note, too, the repeated use of Father in Matt.5-7.
Mark 4:28	So is the ~ as if a man cast seed	Luke 9:27; Matt. 16: 28: Till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.
Mark 9:1	Till they have seen ...come with power	Luke 22:16,18; Matt.26:29 ... in My Father's kingdom.
Mark 8:47	Better ... enter into the ~ with one eye	Luke 23:51
Mark 12:34	Thou art not far from the ~	
Mark 14:25	Till that day I drink it new in ~	
Mark 15:43	Joseph ... waited for the ~	
Luke 9: 82	And looking back is fit for the ~	
Luke 17:20	~ cometh not with observation	
Luke 17:21	Behold the ~ is within (among) you	
Luke 18:29	Left house, parents... for the ~	
Luke 19:11	They thought the ~ should appear	
Luke 19:15	When he returned having received the kingdom	cf. Matt.25:14-31.
Luke 21:31	Know ye that the ~ is nigh at hand	Note v.29f connect with
John 3:3,5	Except a man be born again...	Matt.24:32.
Acts 1:3	Things pertaining to the ~	
Acts 8:12	Philip preaching things concerning the ~	
Acts 14:22	Must through much tribulation enter into the ~	
Acts 19:8	Persuading the things concerning the ~	
Acts 20:25	Among whom preaching the ~	
Acts 28:23	Expounded and testified the ~	
Acts 28:31	Preaching the ~ and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ	
Rom.14:17	For the ~ is not meat...	
1 Cor.4:20	The ~ is not in word but in power	
1 Cor.6:9	The unrighteous shall not inherit the ~	As to inheritance on the part of believers, see Acts20:32; 26:18;
1 Cor.6:10	Nor extortioners inherit the ~	Heb.12:28; James 2:5.
1 Cor.15:50	Flesh and blood cannot inherit the ~	
Gal.5:21	They which do such things shall not inherit the ~	
Eph.5:5	Nor covetous man who is an idolater hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God	
Col. 4: 11	My fellow-workers unto the ~	
1 Thess.2:12	Called you to His (<i>ie</i> God's) kingdom and glory	1 Pet.5:10.
2 Thess.1:5	That ye may be counted worthy of the ~	
Rev.12:10	Now is come the kingdom of our God	Rev.11:15

“The KINGDOM of the HEAVENS”²

The Scope and Meaning of the Expression

1. The Long Silence Broken: John’s Message

The silence of 400 years after Malachi’s last utterance was first broken by John’s ministry in the wilderness, proclaiming, “The kingdom of the heavens is at hand.” This was accompanied with the announcement of judgment upon all that had lifted itself up in pride and rebellion against God, the axe was laid at the root of the tree, the Lord who was coming would drive away the chaff and gather the wheat; on the other hand there would be rich blessing as intimated in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. All of this John declared would be connected with the Coming One who was so much greater than he and was before him, the One in fact “Whose goings forth are of old, from the days of eternity” (Micah 5:2), for John prepared the way of Jehovah Himself, of Him who could say, “Before Abraham was I am,” the Word, the Son of God, yet as come the Son of David, of Abraham, and the Son of Man.

2. The Condition and Expectation of the Jewish People at the Time of John’s Appearing

What would those who heard John think about, or understand by his message? Doubtless the people generally had their minds largely filled with carnal thoughts and expectations based upon false claims of title and superiority which they rested upon natural lineage and national place by covenant relation with God under law. They ignored the consequences of Israel’s utter failure, and the basic need of moral fitness according to God’s requirements, to all of which the prophets had given abundant witness. This was the result of the fanatical zeal and system of teaching developed and assiduously promoted by the schools of the Scribes and Pharisees. John’s ministry struck deep at the root of all this, with the consequence that these leaders rejected him, and thereby the counsel of God. We can see that being under these unspiritual influences even though they turned to the Old Testament Scriptures they would interpret them in the light of such teaching, and look only for Messiah to come in visible glory, pouring out wrath upon the Gentiles only, smiting down all Gentile dominion and giving the Jew first place and supreme authority in the world; and this

² Scripture quotations are generally from the *New Translation* (J. N. D.).

quite apart from any moral or spiritual preparation, but because they were children of Abraham by natural lineage. It is no wonder that John's appearance, the outside place he took, the message he gave, with its scathing denunciation of the prevailing conditions and call to repentance in view of the coming kingdom, startled the masses and at first disturbed, then enraged the leaders. The effect of their teaching and the one-sided expectation nurtured by it, we see in the disciples themselves as we follow the Gospel record. It was all founded upon the over-emphasis put upon certain parts of the prophetic testimony which pride wrested to the gratification of fleshly expectation and worldly ambition, while much else which should have produced Daniel's spirit was ignored, so that outward observances, human traditions, and certain ceremonies became substituted for a right moral and inward state—that state of the contrite heart with which Jehovah made His dwelling. Thus heart and mind became blinded to another and important line of prophetic testimony which foretold of a suffering Messiah who must indeed suffer to enter into His glory. Seemingly they could only think of Messiah as One who, though born of the seed of David in Bethlehem, would when come to years bring in earthly glory, smiting down all Gentile power, giving the Jew the kingdom of which, for example, Daniel prophesied.

3. The Present Interval Indicated in the Old Testament

But there were distinct Old Testament intimations of an interval of undefined duration to follow the coming of Messiah. May not these have been one of the reasons that induced the prophets to search “what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them pointed out, testifying before of the sufferings which belonged to Christ, and the glories after these?” And the Lord could say on the road to Emmaus, “O senseless and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?”

Let us put together some of these Old Testament intimations of this interval.

Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks is an important one. There are 69 weeks unto Messiah the Prince, after which He is cut off and has nothing; then follows the destruction of the city and a period of determined desolations. During this the last week of the 70 is fulfilled, at the end of which only can come the promised blessing, to be realized under the hand of Messiah, as all would allow. Certainly this would be the blessing and victory connected

with that coming of One like a son of man, coming in the clouds of heaven, setting up the everlasting kingdom (Dan.7:13-14,26-27). But it is evident that if this One who is the Child born and the Son given, born in Bethlehem, comes of Israel according to the flesh in the fulness of time, even at the end of Daniel's 69th week, and then cut off, is to set up the kingdom as coming in the clouds of heaven (and this His own words confirm as recorded in the Gospels), *He must go to heaven after His rejection to come from there in that manner for such a purpose.* This Psalm 110 confirms, for it speaks as we know of His session at the Father's right hand until His enemies are made His footstool—an event realized at His appearing in glory, that of the Father and the holy angels. This waiting-time is the period of opportunity for all who will to kiss the Son before His anger burns (Ps.2), as indeed it will when He comes in the clouds of heaven (2 Thess.1:7-8; Rev.1:7; 14:14-16). This will usher in the day of the Lord with its terrific judgments upon all the pride and rebellion of men, upon those who have destroyed the earth. We may add to this the testimony of Peter by the Spirit in Acts 3:17-21. There he tells those to whom the prophets spoke, "Repent ... that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and He may send Jesus Christ, who was foreordained for you, whom *heaven indeed must receive till* the times of the restoring of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began." Again in answer to the question as to restoring the kingdom to Israel the Lord Himself declared before His ascension, "It is not yours to know times and seasons, which the Father has placed in His own authority."

It must be evident from these considerations, and from the fact that the Lord clearly shows in His ministry³ the character of this interval, both in relation to disciples and the world and Israel, though its duration is nowhere specified, that it was not the kingdom in glory, after the manner of Jewish expectation, that was being offered in the message of John and later of the Lord. He knew, whatever may have been the limitations of John's knowledge, that the interval of which we have spoken must come in before what they were anxiously expecting could come. Yet it was still true, no matter what the prevailing misconceptions, that the kingdom of the heavens was at hand, and indeed would be shortly established, all

³ See Section 6.

according to the purpose and mind of God whose dispensational plan was unfolding itself in His advancing revelation consequent upon the coming of the King, whose presence among men was fully evidenced in His great works of power, so that they were without excuse for His rejection. Yet in this too God's counsels were finding fulfilment.

4. The King Come—the Kingdom Established

That which had been promised and announced by the holy prophets (though secrets of grace lay buried in their messages not to be fully apprehended until the due season) was the glory of the kingdom in its aspect of earth-wide blessing, bringing the way of the Lord to pass upon the earth, the way of peace to be known, deliverance from enemies, the full judgment of the wicked, and days of richest blessing enjoyed in peace and righteousness under the hand of God's Anointed. This was the essence of the prophetic message, first given in its incipiency in Eden to the fallen man and woman, and then gradually expanded as further revelation was given. JESUS comes as the Fulfiller of all, so announced and accredited by word and deed. The appeal for His acceptance was therefore based upon Him being the One who fulfilled prophecy and would carry all it promised to complete accomplishment. He was to be thus received by faith, for manifestly He had not come surrounded with the glory of heaven and His holy ones, the manner of coming connected with the setting up of the kingdom in glory on the earth. Other purposes and plans which were ever in God's mind, but which had been kept secret from the world's foundation, would be disclosed in due season. In view of this and in the light of past revelation, the testimony was to the Person who had come; and because of who and what He was shown to be the promises made to the fathers were being confirmed (Rom.15:8-13). In the fact of His presence and ministry they were confirmed as true; further they were vested in Him as the appointed Heir of both Abraham and David; and the order of their fulfilment commenced to unfold with His birth.

As already pointed out, the Old Testament witnessed to a necessary interval between this time and the actual public setting up of the kingdom in glory. So as far as the announcement given by John and the Lord was concerned, the all-essential thing was that the King had come. The call and responsibility was to accept *Him*. He was offered to them, who beyond all question must be the King of the promised glorious and everlasting kingdom spoken of by the prophets, as His mighty deeds demonstrated.

This in particular was the test, a moral test, brought to the Jew by the ministry of both John and the Lord, and not the offer to set up the kingdom in glory at that time. The King Himself was being presented to them and the kingdom was at hand, but in the form known to God.

It was essential as a matter of testimony to which faith could attach itself, and as confirming the Old Testament, that He should be so presented, making it clear to all who had eyes to see and ears to hear that verily He was the One foreordained for Israel, the promised Seed of the woman, Son of Abraham and Son of David, yet Jehovah the Redeemer. Hence the signs, the works of mighty power, which accompanied His presence among men, and which belong to the kingdom in its power and glory.

In the light of what we now know to be God's plans, the kingdom-announcement by John and the Lord could not mean, nor be the proposal on God's part to shortly set up, the kingdom *in glory on earth*. But it was manifestly true that the King of the kingdom when set up in that form was really present, doing its mighty works, having in His hand the power which belonged to it as revealed in the Old Testament, and that in Him every prophecy concerning the birth, person and character of God's King was clearly fulfilled, so that the test was His acceptance or rejection as *so presented*. This being the case, what did the kingdom-announcement really mean?

The kingdom of the heavens is that system or order of rule which is heavenly in contrast to all of a mere earthly form and character. It is the rule of the heavens formally set up in its own dispensation, having been at the first manifested as to its character, power, and glory in Heaven's King when here in humiliation, but who now is sitting at the right hand of power awaiting the hour when He will rise up to subjugate all enemies. That the heavens do rule over the kingdoms of men was declared to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan.4:25-26), but that was, even as now, the providential government of God giving the kingdom of men to whomsoever He will. But the kingdom of the heavens means the manifestation and setting up, in the place of absolute authority and supreme headship, of that One who is God's own Anointed—His Son, and the Son of Man. This, according to the Divine purpose and in God's dispensational order, took place in connection with the resurrection and enthronement of Christ, who though presented to Israel in particular according to the promises and prophecies had been rejected and crucified, in which wickedness the Gentiles had their part.

This kingdom was near during the Lord's sojourn on earth; it came, it was actually set up, when He was raised from the dead and given glory, being taken up to sit on the throne in heaven, after which He was proclaimed on earth as both Lord and Christ. Since then the events and conditions which pertain to the kingdom have been running their course, and will continue to the determined end. For the present the King is still rejected, and evil prevails in both the heavenly and earthly spheres; but universal recognition will come in due season. It is now the time of the King's patience while other things mature.

So the truth is that the kingdom *in glory* is one phase of the kingdom of the heavens. It is that phase particularly presented in the Old Testament agreeable to its general subject-matter and character of revelation which relates to Israel, the nations, and God's purposes as to the earth. Hence it was necessary to show by signs and works of power that Jesus was in truth the One of whom it spoke, and the One to be accepted on this basis, irrespective of whatever else was in view according to God's purpose.

This, however, does not make necessary the conclusion that the kingdom-announcement could only mean an offer to *then* set up the kingdom in glory on the earth according to the Old Testament. There were other phases of the kingdom awaiting revelation, and which only suitably came out in connection with the presence of the King Himself and the accomplishment of those circumstances prophetically revealed concerning Him, including His rejection and enthronement in heaven. These were the *new* things, as the former were the old. Both have their place in relation to the kingdom, and all will be perfectly accomplished in due course. Now, in the light of the New Testament, we know what that course really is, and what was really in view according to God's mind.

This course commenced with the coming of Christ, and His ministry on earth, then the setting up of the kingdom when He proclaims, "All power has been given Me in heaven and on earth." He forthwith commissions His ambassadors, and then ascends to the right hand of the majesty in the heavens. Henceforth the Son of Man is sitting at the right hand of power, and the kingdom of the heavens has come, and since then the events and conditions connected with it have been running their course. Thus we may say that the kingdom announced as at hand is now set up, and that phase of the kingdom revealed in the Lord's ministry with which its mysteries (Matt.13:11) are connected is developing during the King's session on high.

5. Some Distinctions, Yet One Kingdom

The great power committed to Him as King He exercises in various ways in their due season. During the time of the mysteries it is *power possessed in patience* while other purposes are being carried out. At the end it will be *power exercised in judgment*, swift and awful, to purge His kingdom, both the heavenly and earthly parts, of all that offends; then *power manifest in glory*, His universal reign exercised in heaven and from heaven over all the earth—then all that the kingdom of the heavens really means will be fully realized in both heavenly and earthly spheres.

The kingdom of the heavens appears to be the general term embracing the entire system of rule inaugurated in the glorification of Christ, set above all principality, power and every name, angels and authorities being made subject to Him, so that He stands pre-eminent in all things. The mysteries of the kingdom show its character and course during the King's session on the Father's throne, but carry us right to His coming in the clouds of heaven to purge His kingdom and reign over the earth as well as in the heavens. Then it is, as to the earth, the Son of Man and His kingdom; and then of the righteous it is said that they shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, the kingdom in which they are the blessed of the Father, and which when coming into full manifestation has the glory of the Father, and is that which the Father has given to the Son. To the Son the Father has delivered all things. Compare Matt.13:43; 25:34; 16:27; Luke 22:29-30; Matt.11:27.

The kingdom as associated with the coming of the Son of Man in glory seems clearly to refer to a specific development of the kingdom of the heavens. In Matt.13:41 the time of the end is spoken of when He will purge His kingdom; then it is a kingdom already existing in which evil and rebellion prevail; and it would seem evident that the kingdom here is identical with the kingdom of the heavens of which the context treats. The coming of the Son of Man in this form is plainly as Heaven's King invested with heaven's power and glory, accompanied with heaven's angels, and the glory is that of the Father. "The Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt.16:28) does not tell us of a distinct kingdom from that called "the kingdom of the heavens," but simply expresses the final development which effects the establishment of the kingdom in its absolute form—the universal reign of the Son of Man who is the King, and who testified when here, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). It is

then *one* kingdom all the way through, only when it is spoken of in relation to its manifestation in glory on the earth the title of Son of Man is linked with it. Compare Ps.8 and Heb.2. When it is spoken of in relation to believers in its present form, it is “the kingdom of the Son of God’s love;” and it is “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” into which Peter desires that we should have an abundant entrance.

These two expressions, then, “the kingdom of the heavens” and “the Son of Man and His kingdom,” are not to be distinguished as different dispensations. The former includes the whole period from the ascent of the King, and reaches on to eternity; and the latter is the form of it in manifest glory, and embraces the time during which He “must reign until He put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that is annulled is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says that all things are put in subjection, it is evident that it is except Him who put all things in subjection to Him. But when all things shall have been brought into subjection to Him, then the Son also Himself shall be placed in subjection to Him who put all things in subjection to Him, that God may be all in all.” That will be “the end, when He gives up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father; when He shall have annulled all rule and all authority and power.” Thus the eternal state is ushered in by Christ, who is in this connection “the Father of eternity” (Isa.9:6, *New Trans.*).

The kingdom of heaven is not *only* Christian in character, as some recent teaching would make it, so denying its future visible form in power and glory. Indeed what John announces the Coming One will do is quite in agreement with Old Testament prophecy and connects with the day of the Lord, while there is also an aspect of fulfilment in the present time. It is clear that the parables of the kingdom reach on to the time of the end—a time plainly beyond the rapture of the Church (Matt.13:39-41). And the fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are to lie at table in the kingdom of heaven (Matt.8:11) shows that it is not only “the present time, from the day of Pentecost ... until the rapture” (which the writer being quoted claims is “the period designated the kingdom of heaven”), for are the patriarchs seen in such a place *now*? And this would further show that the Messianic kingdom is *part of* the kingdom of heaven—a development of it—for is it not at that time that the Lord’s words about these men of old will be fulfilled? Furthermore, the Lord’s words in Acts 1 cannot be rightly construed to mean that the kingdom according to Old Testament prophecy is not part of the kingdom of heaven, or of God (the things concerning

which had been the subject of His communications to the disciples), simply because He says in answer to their questions, which doubtless referred to the kingdom in glory, “It is not for you to know the times and seasons.” He only affirms that at *that* time the restoration they spoke of would not take place. It could not, for He was going away, and the kingdom could only be restored to Israel when He was present; but He was coming back for that very purpose; this the angels affirm as the disciples gaze into heaven at the ascending King. Meanwhile they are to be His world-wide witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Son of Man, as the Sower of the good seed, had while here begun the founding of His kingdom in the hearts of men, and His ambassadors were to continue the work, claiming all for the rejected Jesus whom God had raised up and made both Lord and Christ—the King in heaven. Furthermore, the fact that He presents Himself as the Son of Man in His teaching as to the kingdom of heaven, and that as such He sowed its seed, and at the end will purge this same kingdom, all helps to make clear that the kingdom of the Son of Man and the kingdom of heaven are intimately related, in fact the former a final phase of the latter.

6. The Lord’s Teaching as to the Kingdom: Its Present Application

Finally, in the Sermon on the Mount and much other teaching of the Lord we get the principles of the kingdom of heaven and what is to characterize those who profess allegiance to Christ; but the King’s rejection is supposed and the position into which this would bring His subjects in a hostile world, whether that be now during the time of the Church’s formation, or later after its removal, when the testimony to Israel will be revived in a character similar to that of the Lord and His disciples during His sojourn on earth. Christ’s ministry as to the kingdom was in view of this whole period which, as He knew, must come in. All could be brought about only through accomplished redemption.

It is plain that much of the Lord’s teaching has in view a time of suffering, rejection, and persecution conditions such as we know in the present age, not those of the time when the glory of the kingdom fills the earth. The kingdom in glory could not come without a people being prepared for the Lord. To the time during which this takes place the Lord’s teaching applies, making plain the moral character and holy principles which govern those to whom the kingdom in reality belongs, whether viewed in its aspect of present spiritual blessing, or of future manifestation in glory in either the earthly or heavenly spheres.

We know that the Lord's rejection was a matter of prophecy, with His ascension to God's right hand, and later coming in glory, so that an interval must be contemplated between His first coming as born King of the Jews and the actual setting up of that heavenly kingdom of which Daniel had specifically spoken.

Now this interval, the duration of which was not specified, yet to the fact of which the Old Testament gave witness, comes out clearly in the Lord's teaching. Compare Luke 19:12; Mark 13:32-37; Matt.23:38-39; 26:64; 16:27; John 6:62; Matt.24 and 25.

It was evident that the King Himself had come. His works of power witnessed to Him. He was Master over all creation, and of Satan too. Yet He was rejected, "His own received Him not." Did this necessitate the postponement of the announced kingdom, or put in abeyance what would have then been set up if He, the King, had been treated otherwise? No, for there was the predeterminate purposes of God to be fulfilled in any case.

Though we may not speak of man's fall and evil course as part of those purposes, all was fully known to God when they were formed, and indeed had a distinct bearing upon the formation of those purposes. As God moved forward in the carrying out of His plans, and along with this dealt with men in their condition which resulted from sin, His successive revelations whenever brought to men tested them, especially that given in the Son. Thus their real condition and attitude toward God was manifested. Yet He in His wisdom and mercy makes use of all in accomplishing His purposes which have to do with the glory of Christ and man's redemption, Israel, the Church, and the blessing of all creation under the headship of the Son of Man.

It was not His purpose to *then* set up the kingdom in glory, for it could only come when the Son of Man should come from heaven, as we have seen. Men because of their fleshly desires and carnal interpretations were entirely mistaken in their expectations. They had missed God's mind in at least one important feature as made known in the Old Testament. This was one reason they saw no beauty in Jesus that they should desire Him, and in due time their cry was, "Away with Him." He was not the man to rule over them.

It seems clear then that no matter what the Jews expected, it was not the kingdom in *glory* which was being proclaimed as near. God's purposes

were in process of accomplishment, and the test for Israel in particular, yet also for the world, at this juncture, was not whether would they have the kingdom in glory, but would they have God's King of that kingdom? He was rejected. Did that mean that the kingdom He announced as at hand was pushed off into the distant future? No; it came, now exists, and in the form that was according to the purpose of God for that foreshadowed interval which continues until the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven to take His own throne. In its present form, as fully revealed in the Lord's parables, it fills the interval of which we have spoken, and then continues in its form of manifested glory and power in what is called the kingdom of the Son of Man.

What is the *present* form of the kingdom which fills this interval? Its moral character, governing principles, and condition in various ways is what very largely made up the Lord's teaching. To this belong the mysteries of the kingdom, those similitudes found in the parables, and things new and old. The kingdom in this form embraces all who profess allegiance to Christ. Such are responsible to show conformity to the moral character which the King Himself made known in His teaching concerning the kingdom. This is surely to find manifestation in and among those who gather together unto His name—His disciples. To them in particular Matt.5-7 is addressed.

The kingdom of heaven was at hand during the Lord's ministry on earth. It actually came when in resurrection He could proclaim that all power in heaven and on earth was His (Matt.28:19-20), though that still did not mean the immediate restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-7). For during the course of the kingdom now come, other purposes were to be fulfilled which were then unknown, and were not made known until Paul was raised up to reveal the mystery of Christ and the Church (Eph.3); but these purposes also belonged to that interval already foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The kingdom of heaven is not the Church, which is the Body of Christ, but this Church is in the kingdom. The kingdom embraces Christendom, the sphere of profession which may be real or not, but all *true* disciples of the kingdom since Pentecost and until the rapture (1 Thess.4) are in the Body of Christ which is the Church.

Now whatever may be the high and heavenly calling and position of the Church as revealed by Paul, it remains true that the assembly of those who gather together unto Christ's name, whether before or after the raising up of Paul, is that company in which the kingdom should find manifestation in

its moral and spiritual features and holy principles as made known by the King. This remains true, no matter what higher and more intimate relation Church truth makes known. *In fact all the practical teaching of the epistles is in agreement with and but emphasizes that of the Lord Himself in relation to the character and conduct of disciples of His kingdom.* This may have been too little observed and heeded in as far as it applies to practical Christian walk, while firmly holding to the precious truth of the Body and Christ the Head in heaven. Surely *we*, of all people, should show ourselves good citizens of the kingdom of the heavens, for *our* commonwealth is in the heavens (Phil.3:20, *New Trans.*). And though the expression, “the kingdom of the heavens,” is dispensational in its relation to the course of time, and by way of distinction the often parallel expression, “the kingdom of God,” is of moral and spiritual significance, it must be clear that they are not essentially different in character.

With these considerations before us we may see that while parts of our Lord’s teaching may primarily relate to Israel, or the nations, or to the time after the removal of the Church when another Jewish remnant will be raised up, and some to the Church itself,⁴ yet there is that which applies in moral and spiritual ways to the believer today. So it is with that beautiful portion called the Beatitudes.

Take for example the fifth beatitude—“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall receive mercy.” Now God is rich in mercy, and those who are His children are to be imitators of Him (Eph.2:4; 5:1). To find a man implacable, merciless, unforgiving, unmercifully pursuing the erring, refusing to show mercy and forgiveness to those who have fallen or injured him, raises serious question as to whether that man’s sin-hardened soul has ever been softened by the blessed inflow of God’s mercy meeting his own great need as ungodly and without strength, no matter how loud the profession of the lips. It is by his fruits that we know the real, the true believer. In this both Paul and James agree. That believers should be merciful is to be expected. That alone is consistent with the knowledge of

⁴ For example: as to Israel—the parable of the treasure. As to the nations—the parable of the net cast into the sea.

As to after the Church—Matt.10 in which the remnant of the Lord’s day and the future are in view; and the Lord’s prophetic discourses.

As to the Church—the parable of the pearl, Matt.16; John 10; ch.13-17.

how God has been rich in mercy for them. Thus they will glorify their Father who is in heaven, and receive mercy according to His perfect love and interest in His children, while also to show mercy to another is the sure way to reap it in our own time of need. Not to show mercy is to lack in righteousness, which is to act in consistency with the place we are in and the way we have been put into it. Compare Matt.18:21-35. “Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36). “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Col.3:12).

Again this is true even where the reference is evidently to the Millennial form of the kingdom as in Matt.5:5, for is *not* the earth part of *His* inheritance, and are not those who now believe, members of Christ, His co-heirs? Hence may not even such a word apply to them who as meek do not put forth present claim as to inheritance here, but await the hour when He takes possession as the Son of Man, the appointed Heir of all things (Ps.8; Heb.2)? Surely it is so, even though they are distinctly heavenly in destiny as the Body and the Bride.

These remarks, I trust, will help to show the broad scope of the expression, “the kingdom of the heavens;” and also what was in the mind of God in sending the announcement of its nearness by both John and the Lord. We can hardly limit it, even when first given, to an offer to the Jews of *that* time of the kingdom set up in glory as presented in the Old Testament. That form of it was not *then* really near, as we well know, the Old Testament itself giving witness to a necessary interval of undefined duration, which the Lord also makes plain in His own teaching. In view of this to make this announcement to be such an offer by God when all the time He knew it was neither the season for it nor was its establishment near, is beside the point. Prevalent misconceptions and more or less carnal views might cause misunderstanding and dullness of apprehension, so that many reaped the pain of disappointment, as even seems to have been the case with John while in prison (Matt.11:2-6), and certainly with the two going to Emmaus of whom it is said that they were senseless and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken. The emphasis throughout is to be laid on the presentation of *the Person* who had come, and with whom is immediately associated all that the kingdom is in its reality, blessing, and *glory* according to God: not upon the offering of some special form of the kingdom. God, by bringing in His Son, the true King in whose hand the kingdom would be set up in accordance with His own

order and purpose, was making a test of man's real condition which would be conclusive beyond all question; on the other hand, according to the fulness of the time, He was acting for the accomplishment of His will in regard to all His purposes of grace and glory, both of heavenly and earthly relation.

The KINGDOM of GOD

This expression, in some passages used as synonymous with "the kingdom of heaven," is, however, the more general term. It is not simply dispensational, but includes what is moral and spiritual. "It is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God in its dispensational relations since the manifestation of the King. These relations have their end in due course, while the kingdom of God is eternal, subsisting after all dispensational changes, and finding final manifestation in the new heavens and new earth wherein righteousness dwells.

Since what is moral and spiritual is connected with the expression "kingdom of God," it is this which is spoken of in the epistles and the ministry recorded in the Acts, for it is those features such as righteousness, peace, and joy which constitute the ministry of the Holy Spirit, especially after Pentecost. Thus the emphasis is on the spiritual blessings, whether as to position before God, relationship with God, or the eternal destiny of all those who believe the gospel of God concerning His Son.

We know that those who believe in this present period are formed by the Spirit into the assembly which is Christ's Body, giving them a very special place and portion in an intimacy of relation known to no other company of the redeemed. That assembly and the kingdom are synonymous in the present, in so far as the latter is viewed in its real, spiritual features and relations which are connected with the Holy Spirit. Still while now there can be none who are really and truly in the kingdom who are not members of Christ's Body, it remains true that what the kingdom of God is in its moral and spiritual character will be known by those who are of faith *after* the removal of the assembly from the earth, that is, the saved Jewish remnant and the saved Gentile multitude of the future dispensations of which prophecy speaks.

It may be well, however, at this point to emphasize the present form of the kingdom of God in view of some recent statements to the effect that the

kingdom of God is wholly future, and that there is no such thing as a kingdom of God on earth today, that in fact it does not exist:

Such texts as the following cannot be relegated to what is wholly future: Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,30,31; Col.1:13; Rev.1:9; Rom.14:17.

If we think of the kingdom of God in the future, as far as this world is concerned we think of the manifestation of the power and glory of Christ as King, reigning over the earth, Israel being restored, saved, and made first of the nations, as prophecy abundantly declares. Then, too, there will be no other kingdom as there is now, for Satan will be imprisoned, he and his hosts being cast out of the heavenlies, so that there is an end to the rule and influence of those principalities and authorities who are the universal lords of this darkness and spiritual powers of wickedness (Eph.6:12). Against these we now struggle. Only at the end of the Millennium Satan will be loosed for a brief final act of rebellion.

It is certain that the kingdom of God does not now exist on earth *after this manner*. Scripture leads us to believe that two kingdoms exist today. The one that will not exist in that future age is present in power today, and so also is the kingdom of God in a present form suited to the time. Both are of moral and spiritual character—that of Satan is *darkness*, that of God, now and ever, *light*, for God is light. Now men are passing from the former into the latter by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. Thus are blind eyes opened to “see,” and those who see “enter” the kingdom of God. They are turned “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me” (Acts 26:18). Thus delivered from “the power (or authority) of darkness,” they are “translated into the kingdom of His dear Son in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins,” for in this way the Father makes “us meet (or, fit) to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col.1:12-14). Such were once darkness, but thus they become light in the Lord (Eph.5:8). Those made fit by the Father to be partakers of the inheritance of saints in light are already saints as sanctified in Christ Jesus, and begin now to participate in their inheritance as a result of present divine operation. They thus have a present as well as future inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph.5:5, etc.).

Peter assures a richly furnished entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, if there is diligence in doing the things

spoken of (2 Pet.1:4-11). This has its bearing for the present and the future. For all such there is that in the future as to the kingdom which they do not now possess except in hope, but there is that which they have of that kingdom in the present which proves its present existence. This is found in the things, in the firstfruits, of the Spirit, and it is summarized for us in Rom.14:17.

Paul's words to the elders of Ephesus are significant. He testified of repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and speaks of the ministry received of the Lord Jesus to testify the glad tidings of the grace of God. He could affirm he had not failed to announce all the counsel of God. But in all this he had gone about preaching the kingdom of God (Acts 20:21-27). These things then pertained to it, and gave to those accepting such a ministry of grace *present* participation in what that kingdom really meant, while as to outward conditions on the earth they might be accounted sheep for the slaughter and endure present suffering for the sake of the kingdom, since in the present we are found brethren and fellow-partakers in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus (Rev.1: 9, *New Trans.*).

When Paul disputed and persuaded as to the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8), it could hardly be exclusively what was future, and then as now non-existent, for it is immediately mentioned that some did not believe "that way"—surely that way of present faith in Christ and the attendant blessings. This appears fully confirmed as we read of Paul in Acts 28. To the assembled Jews he "expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and the prophets." This quite evidently embraced "the salvation of God" in which the Gentiles participate (v.28); and then during the following two years of ministry to all who came Paul occupied himself in "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ" (v.30-31).

In another place the apostle speaks of those who were his fellow-workers for the kingdom of God (Col.4:11). Again, Paul enumerates the works of those who "shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal.5:19-21). They have no fitness to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. And then he immediately says: "But the fruit of the Spirit...". There are those in whom that fruit is now produced. Thus they in the present inherit the kingdom, for such live by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit. This cannot be

apart from righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit—the kingdom of God. This will still be true when the kingdom is manifested in glory on the earth; but believers who have not the glory as yet, produce the Spirit’s fruit, enjoy His firstfruits, and are partakers in those moral and spiritual features which belong to God’s kingdom both now and forever, in present tribulation as in future glory. Both aspects of truth have their place, neither can be set aside without spiritual loss.

The KINGDOM, the ASSEMBLY, and the ASSEMBLIES:

Their Difference and Relation

There are two general aspects of both the kingdom and the assembly, and points of contact between these aspects in each case. In treating of the similarity and contrast between them, we must bear in mind that we are only dealing with the present period, beginning with Pentecost and closing with the Lord’s coming for His people, for the kingdom goes on after that, as already mentioned. We have then:

1. The kingdom in its real, spiritual character in connection with the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In all that the kingdom is in this aspect every true believer now participates, and all such are baptized into the assembly, which is Christ’s Body.

2. The kingdom is also presented in its outward and wider aspect, the result of work done in the “field,” which is the world. This develops along the lines indicated in the Lord’s parables. It is a sphere of profession in which mixture prevails, the good and bad grow together. In a word, it is what we know today as Christendom.

But this is also viewed as the present sphere of privilege and responsibility in which all are who make profession of the Lord’s name, whether real or only nominal. With this side of our subject we may link teaching found in Rom.9-11. There are Gentiles who partake of the root and fatness of the olive-tree, yet do not abide in the goodness of God and are ultimately cut off. And while the kingdom of heaven is not spoken of in this important passage, simply because it is of greater scope, reaching back to Abraham as well as forward to the Deliverer who will come out of Zion, yet what it teaches as to the present in respect to Israel, the Gentiles, and the end of things, corresponds with what we learn from the parables as to the

kingdom of heaven. Within its sphere come those men against whom Jude, Peter, and Paul warn us, whose work is either not good or positively destructive. The fire will consume all such work, and in the latter case the workers themselves are destroyed (1 Cor.3:17). There is no remedy. Faithfulness to the Lord requires separation from the evil and association with the good within this sphere called the kingdom of heaven.

Now there is similarity in certain respects between this aspect of the kingdom and that which is called the assembly of God (not the assembly which is Christ's Body into which enters *only* what is the product of Divine workmanship)—that company of people gathered together on earth by the preaching of the Word, and presented under the figure of "House" and "Temple" wherein, as in the kingdom, responsibility is committed to men, and in which a corrupter may be found, and at which the judgment of God will begin (1 Pet.4:17). To this the history of conditions in the Epistles bears witness. While the term "kingdom of heaven" is not used, though "kingdom of God" is, it must be plain that a condition of mixture and failure through men not fulfilling the responsibility committed to them is clearly depicted in the Epistles and Rev.2 and 3. This answers to the state of things made known in the Lord's parables as to the kingdom. In fact, do not His messages to the assemblies in Asia show the fulfilment of His teaching in this particular respect?

Let us now distinguish in the language of Scripture between the assembly which is Christ's Body and the assembly as otherwise spoken of. It is certainly true that the assembly which is His Body will only be complete and presented perfect in manifestation after the coming of the Lord for His people. Into that Body nothing enters but what is real, the result of divine work. It is revealed fully in Ephesians and Colossians. Then also the truth of the Body is given a *present* application in respect to believers since they are now of that *Body*. It is used to instruct and guide them as to their relations with each other as members of one another and of Christ; their mutual interests, service, and fellowship are to give a practical expression to the fact that they are "one Body in Christ" (compare Eph.4; Rom.12; 1 Cor.12). This is to be given manifestation in the local assembly, as it is said to the Corinthians, "Ye are Body of Christ"—the article not being used makes it characteristic in meaning, it is not that they are *the Body*, so that in result there would be as many Bodies as there are local assemblies.

So the local assembly is never called the Body of Christ, but is called “the assembly of God” in a given place, or the assembly in a city or house. It is referred to as “the temple of God” (1 Cor.3:16-17). In Eph.2 the temple is viewed differently. It is that which is now growing, and not complete; and in the framing of this, not only Jews, but “ye also (*i.e.*, Gentiles) are built together for an habitation of God in the Spirit.” Here let us note that the word “habitation” yields a shade deeper thought than “house”—the former indicates permanence of dwelling, which in this case is by reason of the ever-present and indwelling Spirit. In 1 Cor.3 the local assembly as such (“ye are,” etc.) is called “the temple”. What is not real might come in there as the chapter shows, but not so in the other.

In 1 Tim.3 the apostle associates the figure of “the house” (v.15, “God’s house”) with that local company in which the work of “oversight” and of “deacons” is carried on. This is called “the assembly of God” in verse 5, in this case Ephesus where Timothy was then living (ch.1:3).⁵ The force of what is enjoined in the epistle would apply wherever there are such assemblies, for “the house” has its universal aspect inasmuch as there is to be unity of fellowship in essential doctrine and practice subsisting in all “the assemblies of God,” yet this has its practical manifestation alone in the local assembly. Since the whole assembly, or assembly universal, is never assembled in one place on earth, the local assembly is the concrete object. Thus one’s conduct has immediate reference to the local thing, while ever keeping in view the unity of all saints—the household of faith, and of God (Gal.6:10; Eph.2:19), the Body with its present ministry as set forth in Eph.4; 1 Cor.12; Rom.12.

“The house,” connected with man’s responsibility and conduct as in 1 Timothy, is not specifically called “the assembly which is His Body;” and this would seem to be because that involves more than what is on the earth at any given time, and is a concept eternal in character and only perfect in manifestation after the Lord’s coming, when man’s

⁵ It is interesting to compare with this Acts 20. The apostle calls for the elders of the *assembly* at Ephesus (v.17), and among other things, he says to them: “Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock, wherein the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers to shepherd the *assembly of God*, which He has purchased with the blood of His own” (v.28). As being of the “one flock” (John 10:16) of God’s purchased and called out company, they have, as the local company at Ephesus, the names which belong to the whole, for of that whole they are to be the concrete expression.

responsibility and conduct as now prescribed will have no place. Still, “the house,” in this view of it, has the truth of the Body linked with it inasmuch as that truth is given a present application (as already mentioned) which must have its manifestation in the company of people on earth called “God’s house” and “the assembly of God.” Those who are real, not mere professors, constitute what is called “the Body” as viewed on earth; and among them those manifestations and gifts for present ministry in love to edification of the Body are distributed and exercised by the one Spirit under the headship of Christ. This belongs to the present aspect of Christian calling; the hope of it is future and eternal glory. Of all this true believers are to walk worthy, and there comes in the keeping of the unity of the Spirit—the truth that all believers are one in life, one in respect to His indwelling, one in responsibility to own one Lord and His Word by which all is to be governed and tested.

But as we saw a difference in the use of “temple,” so we may also distinguish as to the use of “house.” There is not only “the house” as seen in the external Body, into which what is not real may intrude, but the figure is used in a sense analogous to the assembly which is Christ’s Body. In Hebrews 3 it applies to true believers who hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end; and likewise in 1 Pet.2, where they are viewed as living stones composing a spiritual house in contrast to the material house known to the Jews. With this view of the “house,” in which the limitation of any local aspect is not introduced (for neither in Hebrews nor Peter is the assembly so presented), the scope is rather universal, and indicates what is common to all God’s people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Believers as being thus constituted God’s house (they are never spoken of as the house of Christ) are of necessity under the rule of God. So we reach the truth of His kingdom in its internal and spiritual character. Therefore they are to walk worthy of God who calls them “to His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess.2:12). They are called by the God of all grace “to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus,” “wherefore let us, receiving a kingdom not to be shaken, have grace, by which let us serve God acceptably with reverence and fear” (1 Pet.5:10; Heb.12:28).

In a previous paragraph we mentioned the use of the term “assembly” in its singular form. It is also used in the plural, and in the following various ways:

The assemblies of the Gentiles	Rom.16:4
The assemblies of Christ.....	Rom.16:16
The assemblies of God.....	1 Cor.11:16; 2 Thess.1:4
The assemblies of the saints.....	1 Cor.14:33
The assemblies of Galatia.....	1 Cor.16:1; Gal.1:2
The assemblies of Asia	1 Cor.16:19; Rev.1:4
The assemblies of Macedonia.....	2 Cor.8:1
The assemblies of Judea	Gal.1:22
The assemblies of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus.....	1 Thess.2:14

Apart from the special revelation of “the mystery,” that is, of Christ and the assembly which is His Body, as found in Ephesians and Colossians, the references to the assembly are to a local company, with the exception of the following in which a universal aspect is at least implied:

“I have persecuted the assembly of God”—not only in Jerusalem but in distant cities (1 Cor.15:9; Acts 26:10-12).

“I excessively persecuted the assembly of God and ravaged it” (Gal.1:13).

“As to zeal, persecuting the assembly” (Phil.3:6).

“And God has set in the assembly: first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers...” (1 Cor.12:28).

That this last passage is universal rather than local, appears from the order of gifts mentioned when compared with that given in Eph.4, where it is what Christ, the Head, gives for ministry to and the blessing of the whole Body. In this way the truth of the Body is applied to the saints on earth, who belong to the assembly which is His Body, and so that truth is to determine their activities together as fellow-members set together in the Body by God for fellowship in mutual service and care. This of necessity can only find practical manifestation in the local assembly, and should be true of all such assemblies.

* * *

But let us now turn to consider, briefly the comparison already suggested—that of the similarity between the kingdom of heaven as presented in the parables and the conditions set forth in the Epistles as to the assembly, that is the external Body, the company of people on earth

with whom in their collective and individual relations what the kingdom is should be manifested according to the teachings and commandments of the King. Clearly it is the administration and the things which pertain to the kingdom which belong to that assembly.

If in the measure suggested the kingdom of heaven is analogous to the assembly of God—that is, there are similar conditions stated of both—there is, however, an important difference in the terms themselves. The term “assembly” means a called-out company. The kingdom of heaven is never presented as being such a company, but is an expression defining a sphere in which certain conditions manifest themselves and develop. As to these action is taken in due time, and results brought about by Divine interposition. Of course people are concerned, but they are in the kingdom and not specifically referred to as the kingdom; as associated together locally they are called the assembly of God, and when otherwise referred to it is “the assemblies.” But in connection with the kingdom, the *field* is spoken of, and that we are told is the world, not the assembly. The difference is evident when it is a matter of government or discipline. In Matt.18, in which v.1-14 and v.21-35 explicitly treat of the kingdom, the Lord speaks in the intervening verses of “the assembly.”

As to the kingdom there is both the outward view and the inward or real aspect. Into the latter only those enter who are converted and become as little children. This is synonymous with the kingdom of God in its moral and spiritual features, and which is the Spirit’s domain where righteousness, peace, and joy are found (John 3; Rom.14:17).

But the assembly, as already stated, is a company of people called out to God. Here too there is the inward or real aspect presented under this term as “the Body of Christ,” the “My assembly” which He builds, and “the mystery” not revealed until given to the apostle Paul. Then there is the outward aspect, the external Body, as we may say, presented under the term “assembly,” and that locally, in the New Testament, is the company of people who assemble together, owning the Lord’s name, exercising themselves in spiritual activities of worship and service according to the guidance of God’s Word. All such companies were in the sphere called the kingdom of heaven, and of God, in so far as these expressions are synonymous in meaning; and all in such companies, according to whether real or mere professors, shared in the realities of the kingdom or simply had an outward association with those privileges and activities which

pertain to such companies. The latter, if remaining such, as in Heb.6 and 10, are cut off in the end.

What we see then, beginning after Pentecost, is that those who believed the gospel met together in their local places, and conducted themselves according to the instructions of the apostles in respect to their collective and individual relations—whether as to worship, discipline, service, mutual care, business or home life. These companies are variously spoken of in the singular and plural. They answer to the assembly referred to in Matt.18, and which is not the same as the assembly in Matt.16, though those in the former who are real believers are in the latter as far as the present period is concerned. But as to the assembly spoken of in Matt.18, it must not be overlooked that it stands linked with teaching as to the kingdom of heaven, and that the kingdom extends beyond the present period, so that we may expect assemblies of similar character in the future period of kingdom-testimony prior to the appearing of the Lord in glory— assemblies, however, which will have no connection with that mentioned in Matt.16.

Thus it was in such companies that the present administration of the kingdom found manifestation. The things of the kingdom, the whole counsel of God, were taught in them, and proclaimed from them to the world. Holiness of life and purity of doctrine were enjoined, and the contrary to be dealt with in the manner prescribed. In view of this let us not forget that such teaching as that of the Lord recorded in Matt.5-7 is of present application. Christians are to walk worthy of God who calls them “to His own kingdom and glory,” and “God has not called us to uncleanness but in sanctification” (1 Thess.2:12; 4:7). In other words, there was to be perseverance “in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42). The Lord’s command was to teach “to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined you.”

From the Acts we know that such companies were formed throughout the Roman world, and from them, as, for example, the Thessalonians, the Word sounded out near and far. Those accepting the Word were baptized, received into such companies, participated in their privileges, and were subject to the order and discipline set up by the apostles.

When we come to consider the practical state of these companies as presented in the New Testament, it is of varied character. Outward unity prevailed, and doubtless did until the middle of the third century, as far as

history is concerned, so that what was seen in the world was “the Jew, the Gentile, and the assembly of God.”

In the assembly at Corinth there was fleshly strife, party-ism, wickedness allowed, and evil doctrine.

In the assemblies of Galatia there was defection from the Gospel and its liberty.

In the assembly at Colosse Judaic-Gnostic notions were working to corrupt their simplicity in Christ.

In the assembly of the Thessalonians there was idleness and its dangers to be rebuked.

Even at Philippi there was a note of strife.

Paul begged Timothy to remain at Ephesus to guard the assembly against wrong teaching. Paul warned the elders of that assembly as to those who would come in, and others who would rise up among them speaking perverted things.

Jude depicts a sad condition of mixture existing in his day.

The assemblies of Asia at the end of the first century, after about fifty years of existence, are in the state revealed in Rev.2 and 3.

This, and yet more in the Epistles, shows the state of things in the closing years of the first century. Furthermore, no prospect of better conditions is given; instead, the Spirit is explicit in declaring that they will, grow worse, as in 2 Tim.3 and 4, until judgment finally overtakes the apostate mass.

Even this cursory consideration must show that the assemblies generally before the last apostle died, were characterized by what the Lord had spoken of in His parables of the kingdom of heaven—a sad mixture of the false and true, the leaven put in and at work, evil agencies used by Satan finding lodgement within these assemblies, growth like that of the mustard-seed already beginning to manifest itself, and this in due course came to maturity as after-history shows.

With this picture of conditions the New Testament closes its actual history, and as we take up other records which give the history of the following centuries it is not recovery we find but further departure. The downgrade is travelled at an ever-increasing pace until we are plunged into the darkness and evil of the middle ages. That darkness was first riven by rays of

evangelical truth through the instrumentality of Luther and other Reformers. There was some measure of emergence from the Slough of Despond, only to be followed by another missing of the way, and the failure to go on in the apprehension of the truth through seeking the world and its power instead of simply trusting God. From time to time God raised up men who struggled against the adverse tide of worldly influences, and were used in various revival movements that rose above the dead level of things, only to slip back again as time rolled by. Most distinctive of all such movements was that of 100 years ago, great beyond all others in the wealth of truth brought to light by the men then raised up of God; but this too has failed—not the truth indeed, for that remains still the light and joy of multitudes and the real basis of the whole evangelical ministry so prominent in certain quarters today, but the outward manifestation of unity among those with whom this movement stands identified is shattered into many fragments. Who can face this history before God and not hide his face in the dust and mourn?

It must be evident that the kingdom of heaven as found today is characterized by those conditions of which the Lord spoke; and that what the apostles warned of in their epistles has come to pass. This appears as the actual fulfilment of the other, but connected by them with the company of people called the assembly or assemblies of God on the earth, His house and temple. At this judgment must begin, and will by the separation of true believers who now belong to Christ's Body from the nominal Laodicean mass at His coming, that mass going on to full apostasy in the circumstances and conditions which arise after the Lord's coming for His people, resulting in final cutting off (2 Thess.2).

In view of these things, and in fact their manifest prevalence for centuries, what has been and still is the path for those who would follow the Lord? 2 Timothy instructs us in this. Separation *from* iniquity and those who promote it, and association *with* those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, fleeing youthful lusts and following righteousness, faith, love, peace. Such are to walk in the light of the place and portion "in Christ" (compare ch.1:1,9-13; 2:1,10; 3:12-17) which belongs to every true believer, and which remains untouched however great the failure of the dispensation. Along with this is the precious and ever-abiding ministry of John—that fellowship in life and nature, oneness in and with the Divine Persons, which is eternal, the present joy and blessing of every one who will take the way by which it is appropriated, even obedience to His Word.

A separation such as that just indicated appears necessary if what Scripture gives as the teaching and fellowship of the apostles is to be followed, and with this the practical enjoyment of spiritual communion as at the beginning, in so far as this is possible under prevailing conditions. This distinctly characterized that movement of 100 years ago already mentioned. Simplicity, lack of pretension, and lowliness marked it, with a sense of the ruin of the external Body. Loss of these moral qualities brought break-up and confusion. But after all there is no other way than that then followed—“Believe that where two or three are gathered in His name, Christ will be, and that the Spirit of God is necessarily the only source of power, and that which He does will be blessed through the Lordship of Christ. These (the Spirit present and the Lordship of Christ) provide for all times. If more be attempted now it will be confusion.” This, of course, now as then, means separation from religious systems of human organization with their many inventions, the product of man’s will and wisdom, in which it is impossible to pursue the path of obedience to what the Lord has commanded. Those who thus act and locally assemble together for Christian fellowship in worship, service and mutual care, are not “the assembly of God” in their place, for that in Scripture language would certainly embrace all known Christians recognized as godly in doctrine and manner of life in that place. But today in what place is “the assembly” not cut up into numerous sects in which are to be found those who hold the faith of God’s elect, and many of these are hidden, as 2 Timothy 2 intimates. No company meeting apart from these unscriptural voluntary religious associations so as to observe the Lord’s order can lay claim to being “the assembly of God” in their place in the same way that the Epistles speak of the assembly.

But while those who may thus assemble are to avoid all pretentious claims, they certainly may use for their guidance in collective and individual relations the abundant instruction found in the Word, especially the New Testament, in the full light of which we are to study the whole.