Kingdom Now or Kingdom Not Yet? The Timing of Christ's Reign

Paper 3 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Every Christian prays some version of "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). Rarely does someone stop to ask what the request actually implies: *that the kingdom hasn't yet come*. That single, almost automatic prayer already contains the whole question this paper takes up. Is the kingdom Jesus preached a present reality, already here in some form, or is it a specific, future, visible reign that has not yet begun?

The disagreement runs deeper than a quarrel between theological hobbyists. It's the fault line running underneath nearly every mainstream Christian's picture of the end times. Whether a person expects a literal thousand-year reign of Christ, believes the Church itself already constitutes that kingdom in a spiritual form, or expects the gradual Christianizing of the present world order, depends entirely on the answer to this one question.

The answer argued here is unambiguous: the kingdom is not yet. It's a specific, future, heavenly and earthly reign, with two portions and two sets of rulers, inaugurated by a specific, future, visible event, which is Christ's return. Nothing presently occurring in the world or in the Church constitutes its arrival.

That phrase, "heavenly and earthly," marks an important distinction. The coming reign is regularly flattened into a purely terrestrial administration, but Scripture doesn't describe it that way. Daniel sees a kingdom given to the saints "under the whole heaven" (Dan. 7:27). Paul speaks of Christ gathering together in one "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven [literally, the heavens] and which are on earth" (Eph. 1:10), and Jesus' own earthly ministry began with the proclamation, "the kingdom of heaven [literally, the heavens] is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). *How* that division came about, and *who* occupies each portion, is worked out in the companion paper on Israel and the Church. What matters here is only the timing, and on that question the two portions stand or fall together.

The Mainstream Landscape: What "Kingdom Now" Means, and Where It Comes From

The phrase "kingdom now" covers more than one position, and several terms in this discussion get used constantly without ever being defined, so the terms come first. The positions are then mapped onto the three traditions this series engages doctrine by doctrine, Reformed, Wesleyan, and Catholic, though the millennial views cut across all three rather than belonging neatly to any one of them. Eastern Orthodoxy isn't surveyed here; it enters the series only where the question is authority itself.

The vocabulary, defined

The **millennium** is the thousand-year period described in Revelation 20:1-7. Everything else in this discussion is essentially a set of answers to two questions about it: is it literal, and where does it sit relative to Christ's return?

Christ's **session** is His present position, seated at the Father's right hand since the ascension (Heb. 1:3; Acts 2:33). Nobody in this discussion disputes that it's real and present.

Christ's **enthronement** is His taking of David's throne to reign over the earth, promised to Mary before His birth (Luke 1:32-33), fulfilling His title of "King of kings" (Rev. 19:16). Whether this has already happened, in some form, is the argument.

The **consummation** is the term most traditions use for the final wrapping-up of history, whenever they locate it.

The **eternal state** is what follows everything else: the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21-22, after the last judgment.

Three positions on the millennium

Amillennialism holds that there is no future, literal, thousand-year reign of Christ on earth at all. The thousand years of Revelation 20 is read symbolically, referring either to the present Church age or to the reign of departed saints with Christ in heaven now. Christ's kingdom is presently and fully operative in a spiritual, non-political sense, chiefly through the Church, and nothing further arrives on earth before the final return ushers directly into the eternal state. This has been the majority position in Western Christianity since Augustine.

Postmillennialism holds that Christ returns *after* a golden-age millennium: a long period, understood symbolically rather than as a literal thousand years by most modern advocates, during which the gospel's advance progressively Christianizes the nations, subdues evil, and brings widespread righteousness and peace to the earth *before* Christ's visible return.

Premillennialism holds that Christ returns *before* a literal thousand-year earthly reign, which He then personally establishes and rules. The label covers a wide range, and those under it differ among themselves over how the kingdom was announced, what became of that announcement, and where Israel stands in it.

The position most evangelicals actually hold

An argument that engages only the three labels above is arguing against the wrong opponent, because the view held by the largest number of thoughtful mainstream readers today is none of them exactly. It's **inaugurated eschatology**, the view that the last things have already begun, usually summarized as "already and not yet," and associated above all with George Eldon Ladd's *The Presence of the Future* (1974) and *A Theology of the New Testament*.

Ladd's claim is that the kingdom broke into history in Jesus' earthly ministry as a real, present, dynamic reign of God, truly inaugurated but not yet consummated. On this reading the parables of growth (Matt. 13), the exorcisms, and Jesus' own announcement that the kingdom "has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28) describe an actual arrival, while the harvest, the judgment, and the return

describe a completion still ahead. This is the reading behind most evangelical preaching on the kingdom, whether or not the preacher has heard Ladd's name.

Its strength is that it takes both sets of texts seriously rather than explaining one set away, and any position holding "not yet" has to give an account of the "already" texts that's at least as careful. The claim to mark is that on Ladd's account the "already" is not merely the King's presence or the kingdom's announcement, but the transfer of rule itself.

Preterism

A fourth position belongs on the map because it's growing in popularity and because it answers this paper's central question differently from all the others. **Preterism** holds that the prophetic material, in its partial form the Olivet Discourse and much of Revelation, and in its full form nearly all of it, was fulfilled in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. On the full preterist version, Christ's coming in judgment has already occurred and the kingdom has been in operation since. This paper answers preterism directly in the objections section near the end.

Mapped onto the three traditions

Reformed tradition doesn't hold a single position. The Westminster Confession itself takes no explicit stand on the millennium. But the Westminster Larger Catechism's own language leans toward postmillennialism: Christ as king "doth gather and defend His Church, and subdue their enemies" already, in His present session (WLC Q. 54), and Christians are taught to pray that "the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world... and the fulness of the Gentiles brought in" (WLC Q. 191). Many Reformed postmillennialists, the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, and the Old Princetonians among them, read that language as describing a real, historical advance of Christ's kingdom in the present age. Other Reformed theologians read the same Confession as compatible with amillennialism, and both readings have long coexisted in confessionally Reformed churches without either being treated as a departure.

Calvin's own treatment sits at *Institutes* 3.25.5. He calls the view of the chiliasts (from the Greek for "thousand," the early name for those who expected a literal thousand-year reign) a fiction "too puerile to need or to deserve refutation," and he takes the thousand years of Revelation 20 to describe "the various troubles which await the Church militant in this world" rather than the blessedness of the Church. But he then spends a page refuting what he had just called unworthy of refutation, and closes by catching himself at it: let us have done with these triflers, he says, lest we seem to think their dreams deserving of an answer. What he actually argues is aimed elsewhere. His objection is that the chiliasts *cap* the saints' blessedness — those who "assign only a thousand years to the children of God to enjoy the inheritance of future life" insult Christ, because "if their blessedness is to have an end, the kingdom of Christ, on whose solid structure it rests, is temporary." What's left of that objection against a millennium understood otherwise is a question about how Revelation 20 should be read, and that question is taken up later.

Wesleyan and Arminian tradition likewise resists a single answer, and its own founder is the clearest example. John Wesley was a convinced postmillennialist. "The Signs of the Times" (1787) identifies the revival then underway as the beginning of a coming, world-converting golden age; "The General Spread of the Gospel" (1783) describes that age in more detail; and only after it, in

Wesley's own scheme, comes the final judgment of "The Great Assize." Later generations in the broader Wesleyan and Holiness movements moved in the opposite direction, largely toward premillennialism, particularly from the late nineteenth century onward. The tradition's own trajectory runs directly through the question this paper addresses without ever settling it.

Catholic teaching is officially and explicitly amillennial, and rules out any form of a future, earthly, political reign. The Catechism states that "the Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism" (CCC 676), adding that "the kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil" (CCC 677). Catholic teaching also makes the strongest identification of Church and kingdom of any tradition surveyed here: the Church "is the seed and beginning of this kingdom" on earth (CCC 541, 763-765). That identification will matter later in this paper.

The Word of the Kingdom Position

On the map just drawn, this position is premillennial in the narrow sense of the word: Christ returns, and then He reigns. It parts from much that travels under that label on nearly everything else — who reigns with Him, on what terms that place is given, and what becomes of the reign's heavenly portion as distinct from its earthly one.

Christ's session isn't in dispute. He has been seated at the Father's right hand since His ascension. What this paper denies is that the seating was the enthronement. The kingdom named in the introduction hasn't begun, and nothing presently occurring in the world or in the Church constitutes its arrival.

The heavens rule the earth: God's absolute reign and the kingdom of the heavens

One distinction has to be set in place before anything else, because without it "the kingdom is not yet" sounds like a denial that God reigns at all right now, which isn't the claim. Scripture speaks of God's reign in two different senses, and this paper keeps them carefully apart.

The first is God's absolute, universal sovereignty, true always and everywhere, outside of and prior to any storyline: "The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). This sense of kingdom never had a beginning and will never end. It's simply what it means for God to be God, and nothing in this paper qualifies it.

The second sense is what this paper is actually about: "the kingdom of heaven," which Jesus also calls "the kingdom of God," using both names for the identical thing in a single breath. Describing the same rich man's difficulty twice over, He says "it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," and then immediately, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:23-24). Unlike God's timeless sovereignty, this is a specific governmental program, the rule of the earth delegated by God through appointed regents, presently contested, presently in the hands of a disqualified incumbent, and moving toward a datable, still-future resolution (Rev. 11:15). Man was made to take the scepter from a ruler already in place, not to occupy a vacancy.

Scripture establishes this delegated structure in its first verse: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The two are named together as a pair because the government running through Scripture's storyline runs from one to the other. Rule proceeds from the heavens down over the earth, through appointed rulers, both invisible and visible. This is not a poetic flourish; it's a governmental structure, and Scripture names both the structure and its occupants precisely.

One subject that almost always gets overlooked is the matter of *which heaven* is being described. Scripture doesn't use the word for one place. The heavens of Genesis 1:1 are the cosmos, created alongside the earth and named with it. Further on in that chapter, "heaven" is the name given to the firmament between the separated waters (Gen. 1:8), and the birds fly "across the face of the firmament of the heavens" (Gen. 1:20).

But God's own dwelling is held apart from these. Solomon prays that "heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You" (1 Kgs. 8:27); Moses says "heaven and the highest heavens" belong to the LORD along with the earth and everything in it (Deut. 10:14); Paul describes a man caught up "to the third heaven" and calls the same place Paradise (2 Cor. 12:2-4). Satan names it himself, as the place he meant to reach but never did: Isaiah calls him "Lucifer, son of the morning," fallen from heaven, who said in his heart that he would "sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north" (Isa. 14:12-13). The place of God's throne isn't what's being contested, and it never has been. The distinction bears directly on the timing question: Christ presently sits at the Father's right hand, in the heaven of heavens, while the rule He hasn't yet taken up is in the *heavens over the earth*, and the earth directly under them. Being seated at one is not an enthronement over the other.

Daniel's own experience makes the structure explicit. Having prayed and fasted for three weeks, Daniel is told by the angel who finally reaches him why the answer was delayed: "the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me" (Dan. 10:13). The same messenger says that once his business with Daniel is finished, "the prince of Greece will come" (Dan. 10:20). Persia and Greece, as visible, historical, earthly kingdoms, have invisible angelic princes ruling behind and through them, real and powerful enough to withstand one of God's own chief princes for three weeks.

Paul names the same layered structure directly: "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven [literally, the heavens] and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16). He goes on to say that structure still awaits full reconciliation, "whether things on earth or things in heaven [literally, the heavens]" (Col. 1:20). That's the *heavens-and-earth* resolution, and it's still ahead. In the meantime the structure is in its disqualified operation: invisible rulers and thrones at war with the God who set them in place, governing visible nations from behind the scenes, which is the very enemy Paul names for the Christian, "principalities... powers... the rulers of the darkness of this age... spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

The thread runs through Genesis well before Daniel makes it explicit. Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, blesses Abram in this same vocabulary: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven [literally, heavens] and earth" (Gen. 14:18-19). We see Melchizedek

uniting the king's office and the priest's office in one figure, foreshadowing Christ, who is named a priest forever "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:6, 10; 7:1-3). Christ serves the priestly half of that order now; the kingly half waits with the throne. And when Jacob flees to Haran, God gives him a dream at Bethel of the same structure in motion: "a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (Gen. 28:12), heaven and earth connected by a real and trafficked passage, with the promise of land and descendants delivered at that very site (Gen. 28:13-14).

The point of tracing the thread is simple. "Kingdom of heaven" (literally "the kingdom of the heavens") needs no special pleading. It's Scripture's own name, established from Genesis onward, for a specific, structured, presently-contested rule of the earth from the heavens, categorically distinct from God's timeless universal sovereignty, and it's the administration of this domain whose timing this paper is asking about.

Six days of work, a seventh of rest: the setting of the whole story

Scripture's opening chapter gives the kingdom its arena. It also gives the story its timetable, and that timetable governs everything from Genesis to Revelation.

Genesis 1:1 records a creation out of nothing: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The very next verse finds that same earth in ruin, "without form, and void," with darkness over the face of the deep (Gen. 1:2). Isaiah says the earth didn't come from God's hand in that condition: "thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18). "In vain" renders *tohu*, the same Hebrew word translated "without form" in Genesis 1:2. Isaiah denies of God's original act the very condition Genesis reports one verse later. Because of this, we should read Genesis 1:2 as the earth *came to be formless and void*; God did not create it formless and void. What follows in Genesis 1:3 through 2:3 is therefore the restoration of a ruined domain, and Moses sums it up in those terms: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day" (Exod. 20:11). *Made, not created*, and the Hebrew words used carry those definitions exactly. Note also that the ruin wasn't confined to the earth. There was no light anywhere until God called for it, which is why the fourth day is spent working on the heavens.

What ruined them is named. Ezekiel's lament tells the anointed cherub, "You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities" (Ezek. 28:18), and his sanctuaries are the heavens and the earth he had been set over. He ruined himself and he ruined what he had been given. God restored the domain in six days and rested on the seventh.

Then the pattern runs a second time, over a second ruin. God made man in His own image and gave him the commission over that same domain. He fell before ever discharging it, and the ground was cursed with him and has borne thorns ever since (Gen. 3:17-18). A ruined creation again, man himself and the ground under him, and one still awaiting the same treatment. The first ruler awaits removal, with no repair promised him (Rev. 20:10). Man is under repair, and that repair runs on the pattern already laid down: six days of work, a seventh of rest. What a day amounts to on that scale is what Peter puts in front of readers who are asking why the promised return has not come: "do

not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Hebrews says the pattern hasn't finished running: "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God," grounded in the seventh day of Genesis itself (Heb. 4:4-9).

Six days of work and a seventh of rest, at a thousand years to the day. That is the setting of the story Scripture is telling. Genesis 1 opens it and the closing chapters of Revelation end it, and the reign this paper is asking about sits at a fixed point inside it. The thousand years is not an isolated number dropped into the last book. It is the seventh day.

Rule requires a bride

There is a condition attached to the dominion mandate at the moment it is issued, and it's easy to read past because it looks like a separate subject.

Genesis states the mandate as a plural: "let *them* have dominion" (Gen. 1:26). Between that statement and its repetition sits a single line explaining who "them" is: "male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). Then the mandate comes again, with a further element in front of it: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion" (Gen. 1:28). Fruitfulness and dominion are one commission, not two, and the first half isn't something a man can perform alone. Genesis says so directly when it comes back to fill in the detail: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Gen. 2:18). Rule was never given to a man by himself. It was given to a man and his wife together, and it could not proceed until she existed.

How she came to exist matters as much as that she did, and the full case for it is made in the companion paper on the Judgment Seat. In brief: God put Adam into a death-like sleep, opened his side, and built what He took into a woman, so that she was "taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:21-23). Paul then quotes the marriage verse that follows and says plainly what he is doing with it: "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31-32). The antitype isn't hard to find. When Jesus had died on the cross, "one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:34). And that blood and water, as instruments of sanctification for the Christian, are exactly the elements that the Bride of Christ is built out of (1 John 1:7; Eph. 5:26).

What follows from that, for this paper, is a question of timing. The Bride is narrower than everyone in Christ. She is the faithful, taken out of the whole body as the woman was taken out of the man, and she is identified at the Judgment Seat, where the righteous acts of the saints are adjudicated. Her preparing is a present and unfinished work (Eph. 5:25-27), and what she wears when she finally appears is made of those same acts: "His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8). What becomes of the remainder is the subject of that same companion paper and is deliberately left there.

The pattern is then repeated rather than dropped. God took the nation of Israel to Himself in the same vocabulary, and Scripture traces the whole arc: betrothal and proposal at Sinai, where the terms are offered and the people answer, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exod. 19:3-8), remembered later as "the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness" (Jer. 2:2); the wedding and the vows in the covenant that follows (Exod. 20-24), stated in marriage terms

by Ezekiel, "I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine" (Ezek. 16:8); then adultery (Hos. 2:2; Jer. 3:1-9); then divorce because of Israel's adulteries, in language that leaves nothing to infer, "I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce" (Jer. 3:8; cf. Isa. 50:1); and then a promised reconciliation, "I will betroth you to Me forever... I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD" (Hos. 2:19-20), tied to a new covenant made with a people whose old covenant God says they broke "though I was a husband to them" (Jer. 31:31-32).

That last stage is why the earlier claim about two portions isn't an arbitrary refinement. There are two brides, and the reign has a shape that matches them: Israel, restored to her husband, in the earthly portion; the Bride, taken out of the whole body and presented to Christ, in the heavenly. A reign with two portions and two sets of rulers is what a structure with two brides produces. The two arcs also have books of their own, Ruth and Esther, the only two books of the canon bearing a woman's name; that material belongs with the division itself and is taken up in the companion paper on Israel and the Church.

Since rule requires a bride, and the Bride of Christ hasn't yet been taken out, made fully ready, presented, or named, the kingdom reign has not begun. Not partially, not spiritually, not in an inaugurated sense. Revelation puts the marriage before the return in glory and both of them before the thrones (Rev. 19:7-8, 11; 20:4), and it puts them in that order because that is the order the pattern has required since Genesis 1.

The disqualified incumbent and the anointed successor

Scripture also supplies a worked example of what this paper says is true right now: a ruler who has been disqualified but hasn't been removed, and an anointed successor who has been appointed but hasn't yet taken the throne.

Saul is told plainly that his kingship is finished: "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king," and "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you" (1 Sam. 15:23, 28). And then Saul goes on reigning for years. Disqualified and still on the throne, still commanding armies, still occupying the office he had already lost.

David is anointed in the meantime: "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). Yet he doesn't seize what has been given him. Twice he has Saul at his mercy and refuses, on a stated principle: "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed" (1 Sam. 24:6; cf. 26:9-11). He waits for God to remove the incumbent.

What he does while waiting is the part that matters most. He goes to the cave of Adullam, and out of Saul's own kingdom "everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them" (1 Sam. 22:1-2). A gathering of the willing, out of the territory the disqualified king still governs, to a man who holds the anointing but not yet the crown. And when the crown finally comes, those men are the ones given position under him (2 Sam. 23:8-39; 1 Chron. 11-12).

The parallel holds because both sides of it are *anointed*, which is what makes this a *type picture* rather than just a resemblance. Ezekiel addresses the ruler standing behind the king of Tyre — Satan — as "the anointed cherub who covers," established by God on His holy mountain, "perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you," and then sentenced: "Therefore I cast [will cast] you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God" (Ezek. 28:14-16). The sentence is pronounced and has not been carried out, which is why Scripture goes on calling him the ruler of this world long afterward, and why Jesus can say, days apart, that the ruler of this world "will be cast out" and that he "is judged" (John 12:31; 16:11). Judged already, removed later. The address can't be bent to fit a human ruler of a Phoenician seaport. This one was in Eden, was created rather than born, and was set on the holy mountain of God (Ezek. 28:13-14). Divinely appointed, disqualified for a specific act, and still in operation, which is Saul's position exactly, and what Paul assumes when he calls the same being "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Set that against what Hebrews says Christ is presently doing, "waiting till His enemies are made His footstool" (Heb. 10:13), and the type and its fulfillment say the same thing. The anointing is real. The gathering is underway. The throne is not yet occupied.

This age and the age to come

Before any particular text is argued, there's a division Jesus Himself uses so casually and so often that it functions as an assumed background rather than a doctrine He has to establish.

He speaks of a sin that will not be forgiven "either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12:32). He promises that whoever leaves house or family "shall receive a hundredfold now in this time... and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:30; cf. Luke 18:30). Paul says Christ is seated far above every name that is named, "not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21). Hebrews describes those who've tasted "the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5), which is language about a coming age applied to a present experience, and the very sort of language a "not yet" reading predicts: a foretaste of an age whose arrival is still ahead.

Two ages, in sequence, with a boundary between them. If Christ's reign over the earth belonged to this age, the vocabulary would be redundant. Every argument that follows is, at bottom, an argument about which side of that boundary the reign falls on.

What the coming reign actually looks like

The mainstream positions surveyed above tend to describe the kingdom in terms of what it does spiritually. Scripture describes it in terms of what it looks like, and the description is specific enough to be tested against both the present age and the eternal state. It matches neither.

Isaiah sees the mountain of the LORD's house established above all other mountains, nations streaming to it, disputes between nations judged from Jerusalem, and swords beaten into plowshares because war has been abolished by decree rather than by persuasion (Isa. 2:1-4). He describes a ruler from the stem of Jesse who "shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth," under whom predator and prey lie down together and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:1-9).

Then comes the detail that fits nowhere else. Isaiah describes a period in which death still exists but has been pushed to the margins: "No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isa. 65:20). Long life restored, and death still present. That describes neither the present age, where infants die and a hundred years is nobody's youth, nor the eternal state, where there's no more death at all (Rev. 21:4). It describes a third thing, bounded on both sides.

Jeremiah names the ruler: a Branch raised up to David, who "shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth" (Jer. 23:5). Ezekiel describes David's servant as king over a reunited Israel dwelling in the land, with God's sanctuary in their midst forevermore (Ezek. 37:24-28). Zechariah is the most physically concrete of all: the Mount of Olives splits from east to west when the LORD's feet stand on it, the LORD becomes "King over all the earth," and the surviving nations go up year after year to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, with drought as the penalty for those who do not (Zech. 14:4, 9, 16-17).

None of that has happened. It hasn't happened invisibly, spiritually, or in any other qualified sense, because the promises aren't about invisible things. Nations don't currently bring disputes to Jerusalem. Predators still hunt. Nobody dies at a hundred years old and is thereby considered to have died young.

A reader will object that much of this language is poetic, and poetry can carry a figurative sense. That's true. It is also true that the same interpreters who read Isaiah's wolf and lamb figuratively read Isaiah's virgin, Micah's Bethlehem, and Zechariah's thirty pieces of silver literally, because those had literal fulfillments. The question is not whether prophetic language can be figurative; it's why the first advent's prophecies were fulfilled to the letter and the second advent's are assumed not to be.

The thousand years: Revelation 20 on its own terms

Revelation 20 is the passage the whole argument turns on.

The phrase "a thousand years" appears six times in six verses (Rev. 20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). Repetition on that scale draws attention to itself. John has used a great many symbolic numbers in this book, and he doesn't repeat any of them six times in a single paragraph while attaching a start point and an end point to each occurrence.

The repetition has company. The pattern set out earlier, in the section on the six days, puts a seventh day at the end of six thousand years of work, and a thousand-year reign is what falls there. So the number doesn't stand on John's repetition alone. It's the seventh day, and John isn't introducing it so much as arriving at it.

Three features of the passage resist a present-age reading.

First, Satan is bound. An angel lays hold of him, binds him, casts him into the bottomless pit, shuts him up and sets a seal on him, "so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 20:2-3). Five actions, every one of them restraint, and a stated purpose. That's hard to hold alongside Peter's description of the same enemy as one who "walks about like a

roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8), or Paul's calling him "the god of this age" who "has blinded" the minds of those who do not believe (2 Cor. 4:4), or John's own statement that "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). Deceiving the nations is what he's described as doing now. The usual amillennial answer is that the binding is partial, restricting Satan from preventing the gospel's spread among the nations. That is a coherent reading of a chain, but it is a strained reading of a pit that is shut and sealed.

Second, the scene has occupants, and some of them are dated. John sees thrones, "and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them," and then, as a second sight, the souls of those beheaded for their witness, who "had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark," and who "lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4). The beast and the mark are the previous chapters' material, so the reign John describes begins after them.

Third, and most decisive, is the grammar of the resurrection. John writes: "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:5). John describes both groups with the same verb for coming to life, *zao*, in consecutive sentences. If the first group's living is a spiritual resurrection at initial salvation, then the living applied to the second group in the same breath has to be spiritual too, which would mean the rest of the dead are spiritually regenerated after the thousand years. Almost nobody holds that. The alternative is to make the word mean two different things in two adjacent clauses, which is what the symbolic reading requires and rarely admits.

Two textual matters belong here, since the argument rests on this verse, and neither helps the symbolic reading. The first half of verse 5 is absent from Codex Sinaiticus, a fourth-century copy of the Greek Bible, from the Syriac translation, and from a number of later Greek manuscripts. It is present in Codex Alexandrinus, a fifth-century copy and the stronger witness in Revelation; in the received text behind the King James and New King James; and unbracketed in every modern critical edition, the scholarly Greek texts built by comparing the manuscripts against each other. Traditions that disagree about a great deal agree here. The likeliest account of the omission is mechanical, since verse 4 ends with "a thousand years" and the disputed clause ends with the same words, and a copyist whose eye moved from the first to the second would drop everything in between. That's an easier accident to credit than a later hand inventing a sentence that happens to end exactly where the previous one did. The second matter concerns the verb itself. The critical text has the identical form in both verses, *ezesan*, lived. The received text has the compound in verse 5, *anezesan*, lived again, which is what the New King James renders. Either way the objection fails. On the one reading it's the same word twice over; on the other, the second occurrence says *live again* outright, which is harder to spiritualize rather than easier.

The kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdom of our Lord

Scripture also gives this event a plain, non-symbolic statementa. At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, loud voices in heaven declare: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15).

The verb decides it. *Have become* is heaven’s announcement, at the last trumpet, that the transfer is settled, and it describes no rule that had been quietly in effect since the first century. The same

proclamation runs straight on to “the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints” (Rev. 11:18), and Revelation narrates those events chapters later, so the voices are declaring the outcome, not marking the hour the reign begins. The King takes His throne when He comes, after the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-8, 11-16; 20:4). Daniel's stone that breaks in pieces the kingdoms of men and becomes a great mountain filling the whole earth (Dan. 2:35, 44-45) and John's declaration that the kingdoms of this world have become Christ's are the same event described twice, and neither description permits reading the transfer as already accomplished.

A reader will notice that the same sentence says He "shall reign forever and ever," which sounds like the opposite of a reign lasting a thousand years. Both halves stand. The reign proclaimed at the seventh trumpet doesn't end; the thousand years bounds one arrangement of it, with the throne shared one way during that period and another way afterward. The objections section takes that up in full.

Waiting, not yet reigning: the language of the present interim

A further line of evidence turns on what Scripture says Christ is presently doing, as distinct from what it says He will do.

Hebrews describes His present position in David's language rather than its own: "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool" (Heb. 10:12-13). That is Psalm 110:1, which the letter had already quoted outright in its opening chapter, asking to which of the angels God ever said, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (Heb. 1:13). The seat and the waiting are where Hebrews begins and where it returns at the close of its argument about the sacrifice. The verb is *waiting*, a present, ongoing state of expectation, not present reign over subdued enemies. The position at the Father's right hand is real and immediate, and the text specifies what it presently consists of: the completed, once-for-all work of Calvary, held in a posture of waiting for a still-future subjugation.

The same letter has already made the point about man's own rule. Quoting Psalm 8, it says God "left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him" (Heb. 2:8), in a passage whose announced subject is "the world to come, of which we speak" (Heb. 2:5). Promised, and not yet in effect.

Paul states the sequence even more explicitly, mapping it onto the order of the resurrection: "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father... For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. 15:23-25). Christ's resurrection, then His people's resurrection *at His coming*, then the reign, then the end. The reign lies ahead of that resurrection, not behind it.

Psalm 110 and this passage look as though they collide. The psalm has Christ seated and waiting until the Father makes His enemies His footstool. Paul has Him reigning until those same enemies are under His feet. If the footstool were finished the moment He rose from the seat, the reign would have nothing left to do.

The psalm's next verse settles it: "The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!" (Ps. 110:2). He rises to rule among enemies, not over enemies already flattened, and the psalm keeps going in the same direction: He executes kings in the day of His wrath and judges among the nations (Ps. 110:5-6). The *till* of verse 1 marks the end of the sitting, not the end of the subduing. He's sent out of Zion to make the footstool, not because it has already been made.

That's why Paul can put the subduing inside the reign. The enemies go down in stages. At His return the beast, the false prophet, and the armies gathered with them are put down, and Satan is bound and sealed in the pit (Rev. 19:19-21; 20:1-3). Through the thousand years He rules the nations "with a rod of iron" (Rev. 19:15), which is rule over subjects who still need ruling, since Isaiah's sinner is still there and still accursed at a hundred years old (Isa. 65:20). At the end of the thousand years Satan is released, gathers a last revolt, and is put away for good (Rev. 20:7-10). Death goes last of all: "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26), and Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire after that revolt (Rev. 20:14). Then the kingdom is delivered up to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24).

So the two texts describe one long subjugation from opposite ends. The psalm says where Christ is until it begins. Paul says what He is doing while it runs. Neither leaves Him finished now, and neither has Him finished at the return.

Later in the same chapter Paul states a condition that rules out any present possession: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:50). Every living person, Christians included, is still flesh and blood. If flesh and blood can't inherit this kingdom, and everyone presently reading Paul's words is still flesh and blood, the inheritance cannot presently be in hand.

Paul also says the creation itself is still waiting. It "was subjected to futility," groans together in labor pains, and waits "for the revealing of the sons of God," in hope of being "delivered from the bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8:19-22). A creation still groaning is not a creation under a reign that has already begun.

And the angel's words to Mary specify what's owed and to whom: "the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). The throne of David, over the house of Jacob. No visible, historical fulfillment of that promise has occurred.

Two thrones, named in one sentence

The clearest single statement that Christ's present seat and His coming seat are not the same seat comes from Jesus Himself, in a promise to the overcomer: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

Two thrones are named in one sentence, distinguished by whose they are and by when they are occupied. Christ presently sits on His Father's throne, an accomplished fact stated in the past tense. He speaks of His own throne as something still to be shared, in the future, with those who overcome. If the two were one throne, the sentence would be incoherent.

The kingdom shown ahead of time: the Transfiguration

Jesus has drawn His disciples aside at Caesarea Philippi and asks them, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" and then, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:13-16). From that point He begins to tell them what will come next: He must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be raised the third day (Matt. 16:21). Then He turns to what following Him will cost: a life lost now for His sake and found later, and a soul a man can forfeit even while gaining the whole world (Matt. 16:24-26). And He closes that teaching with a promise and a date:

> "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (Matt. 16:27-28)

Those two sentences belong together, and the first sets the terms for the second. The Son of Man comes in His Father's glory, attended by His angels, bringing with Him a repayment according to works, which is the subject of the companion paper on the Judgment Seat. That is the event Jesus then calls "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom," so the kingdom arrives when He does, in glory and with the angels, rather than at a seat taken in heaven or at the outpouring of the Spirit.

Then He says some of the men in front of Him will see it before they die, and Matthew moves straight on:

> "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. ... While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" (Matt. 17:1-2, 5)

Six days after the promise, three of the men who heard it saw the Son of Man in the glory it described. The reading offered here is that they weren't shown a picture of that glory so much as *brought to the event itself*, carried ahead of their own moment the way prophets at other times were shown what was still to come. That is a reading rather than a demonstration, and its limits are taken up among the objections below. The timing doesn't depend on it. On either account, the three saw the King in glory, not a kingdom already governing the earth, and they walked back down the mountain into the same world they'd left, with Jesus still on His way to Jerusalem.

He even set the sight on a clock. Coming down, He told them, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead" (Matt. 17:9). What they'd seen pointed past the cross and past the empty tomb. It was the kingdom shown ahead of time, and it was shown to them because it had not yet come.

The apostles never stopped asking

An argument about timing can be tested by watching how the men who were there behaved afterward. If the kingdom arrived at the cross, the resurrection, or Pentecost, the apostles are the last people who would still be waiting for it. But they were.

Forty days after the resurrection, with the risen Jesus in front of them, the apostles ask: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). This is the moment for a correction if

one is needed. The question assumes a national, political, Israel-specific kingdom that hasn't yet been restored, and it assumes Jesus will be the one to restore it. He corrects the question He was asked and nothing else: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). Not "you have misunderstood what the kingdom is." Not "it is here already, in your hearts." He declines to give a date. Declining to give a date concedes that there is one.

Weeks later, after Pentecost has come and gone, Peter is preaching in Solomon's porch and describes what's still outstanding: "times of refreshing" that will come from the presence of the Lord, and Jesus Christ, "whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21). Heaven must *receive* Him, and *until* is a boundary word. Peter, standing in the aftermath of the very event most often proposed as the kingdom's arrival, describes Christ as retained in heaven pending a restoration the prophets described and history has not yet seen.

The pattern holds to the end of the New Testament. Paul tells Agrippa that he stands on trial "for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers," a promise Israel's twelve tribes hope to attain by serving God night and day (Acts 26:6-7). Writing near his death, he speaks of Christ who "will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1), pairing kingdom with appearing as a single future moment, and says the Lord "will preserve me for His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18). James tells poor Christians they are heirs of a kingdom God "promised to those who love Him" (Jas. 2:5). Peter tells his readers to be diligent so that "an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11), which is entrance vocabulary for something not yet entered.

None of these men writes as though the reign has begun.

The apostolic correction of an over-realized kingdom

There is one further piece of evidence, and it's the most direct of all. The New Testament records apostles correcting Christians who had run ahead of the kingdom's arrival: one church living as though it had come, another persuaded that the Day itself had.

Paul's sarcasm to the Corinthians is unmistakable: "You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!" (1 Cor. 4:8). *Already* twice, then a reign claimed as accomplished, all aimed at people whose sense of present triumph had outrun the facts. Paul's own posture in the very next verses is the opposite: apostles displayed last, as men condemned to death, hungry, poorly clothed, homeless, made "the filth of the world" (1 Cor. 4:9-13). Paul has no quarrel with the hope of reigning. He says outright that he wishes they did reign, so that he might reign with them. What he corrects is the timing.

The Thessalonians made a version of the same mistake, shaken by word going around "as though the day of Christ had come" (2 Thess. 2:2), and Paul answers with a sequence rather than a reassurance: "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed" (2 Thess. 2:3). Two named events stand between his readers and that Day. Neither had occurred.

Paul also names two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who "have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:17-18). That is a specific, named error, described as *overthrowing faith*, and its content is the claim that a future event had already happened. The New Testament treats this error, placing in the past what is still to come, as a serious problem, not a harmless enthusiasm.

A kingdom divided cannot be a kingdom standing

One further observation belongs here. It supports the case without proving it, and it reaches only some of the positions.

Answering the charge that He cast out demons by Satan's power, Jesus reasoned: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand" (Matt. 12:25). The principle is general and self-evident. A kingdom at war with itself collapses.

If Christ's kingdom were already in visible operation now, and if the visible institution most closely identified with it were its present expression, that principle would have to be tested against the facts. What anyone can observe is centuries of fracture: thousands of institutionally separate, frequently opposed bodies, all claiming the same King.

Most amillennialists will answer that the kingdom is Christ's reign, not the sum of denominational structures, and that a divided visible church proves nothing about an invisible reign. That answer is available, and it's fair.

But it isn't available to everyone. Catholic teaching identifies the Church as "the seed and beginning" of the kingdom on earth (CCC 541, 763), and postmillennial readings identify the kingdom's present advance with the visible progress of Christianity through history. Against those two positions specifically, the observation lands, because both of them have committed to a visible measure. Against the invisible-reign version of amillennialism it doesn't land. Jesus' own words in Matthew 12:25 were spoken about Satan's kingdom, not His own, and the application here is by extension of a stated principle rather than by direct exposition.

Where They Align

Set the position back alongside the three traditions — Reformed, Wesleyan, and Catholic — and the millennial schools that cut across them, and the common ground runs wider than the disagreements suggest. Four points:

- Every position compared here affirms that Christ presently holds real authority. The disagreement is over the nature, scope, and exercise of that authority, not over whether He holds any.
- Every position affirms that Revelation 20 describes something real, whether a present spiritual reality, a future golden age preceding Christ's return, or a future reign following it.
- Every tradition treats "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10) as a meaningful petition rather than an empty form. Even amillennialism, which locates the kingdom's present operation in the Church, still prays for a future consummation (CCC 677).

- Every position holds that history is going somewhere under God's direction, and all but one hold that it ends in Christ's visible return. Full preterism is the exception, having placed that return in the past; every other position surveyed here still looks for it. Nobody surveyed is a pessimist about the outcome.

The disagreement is therefore narrower than it looks. It is not about whether Christ will reign. It is about whether He has started.

Where They Diverge, and Why

The single fork: session or enthronement

Nearly every version of kingdom-now theology leans, explicitly or implicitly, on collapsing two things Scripture keeps separate: Christ's present session at the Father's right hand, and His future enthronement, whether on David's throne over the earth (Luke 1:32-33) or in the kingdom reign conducted from the heavens over that same earth (2 Tim. 4:18; Dan. 7:27).

Peter's Pentecost sermon quotes Psalm 110:1 directly, "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'" (Acts 2:34-35), as proof of Christ's resurrection and exaltation. That session is real and present, and this paper affirms it without reservation. What it denies is that the session is identical to, or already constitutes, the Davidic earthly reign promised in Luke 1:32-33.

Earlier in the same sermon Peter does mention David's throne, and the mention is sometimes read as dating the enthronement to the resurrection. His argument runs the other way. David wrote that God's Holy One would not see corruption, and David is dead and buried with his tomb still standing in Jerusalem, so he can't have been speaking of himself (Acts 2:25-29). Knowing God had sworn that a descendant would sit on his throne, he "foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ" (Acts 2:30-31). The throne promise is the premise, not the fulfillment: if the promised Son must one day sit on that throne, He can't remain in a grave. And Peter says where He is now, in his own words rather than by inference: "exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33). The sermon moves from David's throne to the right hand and stops there. A man announcing an enthronement on David's throne does not finish by seating his subject somewhere else.

The psalm Peter quotes distinguishes them itself. Sitting at the right hand *till* enemies are made a footstool is one act, and reigning over enemies already subdued is another. Nor is this a minority reading of an obscure verse. Psalm 110:1 is cited or echoed in the New Testament more often than any other verse of the Old Testament, and every writer who quotes it outright keeps the *till*: Jesus against the Pharisees (Matt. 22:44), Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:34-35), Paul at Corinth (1 Cor. 15:25), and Hebrews at both ends of its argument (Heb. 1:13; 10:13). The psalm's own next verse, quoted earlier, says what follows the waiting: the rod of His strength is sent out of Zion, and He rules in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2). The sending is future, and the rod goes out of Zion, which is where the reign begins rather than where the session is. And Christ names the two thrones separately in one sentence (Rev. 3:21). Kingdom-now readings across all three traditions tend to treat the heavenly session as functionally equivalent to the earthly enthronement. Scripture's own language keeps two events, and two thrones, apart.

Literal or symbolic: the same question, asked once

Underneath the millennial disagreement is a disagreement about how to read prophecy, and it explains why the same texts produce such different results.

Amillennial and postmillennial readings treat Revelation 20's thousand years, Isaiah's restored longevity, Ezekiel's temple, and Zechariah's split mountain as figurative descriptions of spiritual realities. The reading here treats them as descriptions of a period, in the same way the first advent's prophecies described events that then occurred as described.

Neither side applies its rule uniformly. Nobody reads Revelation's every number literally. Nobody reads Isaiah's every image figuratively. What this paper claims is narrower: that a passage which repeats a duration six times, attaches a beginning and an end to it, and places a named group inside it, is doing something different from a passage that calls Christ a lamb.

What becomes of Israel's promises

The third divergence is the one that generates the most heat and gets the least direct argument. If the Church is the kingdom, then the land promises, the throne promise, and the national restoration promised to Israel have either been transferred to the Church in spiritual form or been forfeited. If the kingdom is future, they remain outstanding, still to be kept to the people they were made to.

This paper doesn't settle that question; it's the subject of the companion paper on Israel and the Church. It notes only that the timing question and the Israel question can't be separated. A kingdom already present in the Church has to reassign Israel's promises to someone. A kingdom still future does not.

Answering the Objections

The kingdom-now positions have real exegetical ground under them. They lean on specific, frequently preached texts. Twelve objections follow, most of them built on one of those texts.

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth"

The charge. Christ's own last words in Matthew settle it: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Paul says the same, that God seated Him "far above all principality and power and might and dominion" and "put all things under His feet" (Eph. 1:20-22). If all authority in heaven and on earth is already His, the reign has begun by definition, and everything in this paper is arguing against a verse of Scripture.

The answer. This is the strongest text on the other side, and the answer begins by granting it fully. The authority is real, total, and present. Nothing here qualifies it.

But authority granted and authority exercised in visible administration are two different things, and the Ephesians passage keeps them apart itself. Before Paul says all things are under His feet, he says God raised Him and "seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:20). That seat is the one Psalm 110 describes, and the psalm attaches a term to it: sit at My right hand *till* I make Your enemies Your footstool. Hebrews reads the seat the same way, describing Him as seated and

"waiting till His enemies are made His footstool" (Heb. 10:12-13). Both statements stand. The title is granted; the possession is not yet taken.

Notice also what Jesus does with the authority in the very next sentence. He does not announce a reign. He issues a commission: go, disciple, baptize, teach (Matt. 28:19-20). The authority is invoked as the warrant for a mission conducted in an age when the nations are still to be discipled one at a time, not gathered under a scepter. And Paul, in the same Ephesians passage, adds a phrase that assumes a boundary: Christ is above every name that is named, "not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21). Two ages, again, in the middle of the very text used to say there is only one.

"The kingdom of God is within you"

The charge. Jesus told the Pharisees that "the kingdom of God does not come with observation... for indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21). A kingdom that does not come with observation and is inside people is exactly the present, internal, spiritual kingdom this paper denies.

The answer. Two things complicate that reading, and the first is that the Greek is disputed among mainstream scholars, not only by this project. The phrase *entos hymon* can mean "within you," describing an internal reality, or "in your midst," describing something standing among them. Both are attested senses.

The second is the audience, and it's decisive. Jesus is answering hostile Pharisees who had just demanded to know when the kingdom would come. An internal-possession reading requires the kingdom of God to be inside the Pharisees, which no one who holds that reading actually believes. "In your midst," referring to the King standing bodily in front of them and unrecognized, fits the grammar and fits the audience, and it fits the rest of the passage, where He turns immediately to His disciples and describes His coming as visible and unmistakable, like lightning flashing from one end of heaven to the other (Luke 17:22-24). A kingdom that does not come with observation in verse 20 and comes like lightning in verse 24 is one kingdom described at two moments, not a spiritual reality that never becomes visible.

"The kingdom of God has come upon you"

The charge. After casting out a demon Jesus said, "if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). The verb is past. The kingdom arrived during His earthly ministry, which is the heart of the inaugurated reading.

The answer. The kingdom was really present in the person of its King, really near, and really attested by this kind of sign. That's what John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Twelve had all been announcing: "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). *At hand* is proximity language. It is what one says of something arriving, not of something arrived.

The verb in Matthew 12:28, *ephthasen*, carries the sense of having reached or arrived upon, and it fits an offer authenticated by signs. But an offer, however real and however well attested, is not an administration. The same chapter that contains this verse ends with a generation being told it will receive no sign but Jonah's (Matt. 12:39-40), and the chapter that follows turns to parables Jesus says are given because that generation would not hear (Matt. 13:10-15). Something changed in that

sequence. If the rule had already been established and handed over, there'd have been nothing left to change.

The apostles' question after the resurrection settles it. Forty days after He rose, they asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" and He answered, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:6-7). If the kingdom's rule had begun back in Matthew 12, that question makes no sense, and His answer makes less, since He'd be declining to date something that had already happened.

"He has conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love"

The charge. Paul writes that God "has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13). Past tense, completed, already accomplished for every Christian. People are in the kingdom now.

The answer. The transfer is real and complete, and it's a transfer of allegiance and citizenship rather than a statement about the kingdom's present administration on earth. Paul uses the same kind of settled, accomplished language elsewhere for realities not yet visibly in effect. He tells the Ephesians that God "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6), which isn't a claim that his readers were no longer walking around Ephesus.

Paul also puts the two side by side himself, in the same letter. He says the Colossians have been conveyed into the kingdom in chapter 1, and in chapter 3 he says their life "is hidden with Christ in God," and that "when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:3-4). Possessed now, manifested later. Changing whose subject a man is and the kingdom ruling visibly on the earth are two different claims, and the man who wrote both sentences evidently held them apart.

"John already calls himself a companion in the kingdom"

The charge. John writes that he is "your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9). Present tense, first century, kingdom.

The answer. Read the three nouns together. John pairs kingdom with *tribulation* and *patience*, and he is writing from exile on Patmos. Two of those three words describe present suffering and present endurance. If the third described a reign presently in operation, it would sit oddly between them.

What John describes is his own shared position with every Christian: in the struggle belonging to a kingdom that's coming, sharing its cause and its cost before sharing its rule. The book he goes on to write says so. It ends with the kingdoms of this world becoming Christ's at the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15), and with thrones set and a reign beginning in chapter 20. John did not think he was already reigning; he was on an island for the word of God.

"It was all fulfilled in A.D. 70"

The charge. The preterist answer is that Christ's coming, the tribulation, and the kingdom's arrival all belong to the generation He addressed. He said "this generation will by no means pass away till

all these things take place" (Matt. 24:34), and Jerusalem fell within forty years. The kingdom has been in operation since.

The answer. The strength of this position is that it takes Jesus' own time markers seriously, and that's a real virtue. The difficulty is what has to be spiritualized to make it work.

Matthew 24 says the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall, and "all the tribes of the earth" will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory, and that He will send angels to gather His elect from the four winds (Matt. 24:29-31). Whatever happened in A.D. 70, it was not visible to all the tribes of the earth, and no gathering of the elect from the four winds occurred.

The phrase "this generation" admits more than one referent, and nothing here depends on settling which. It may point to the men Jesus was addressing, as the same phrase does elsewhere in Matthew. It may point to the generation just described in the sentence before it, the one that sees the signs and knows that summer is near, at the doors (Matt. 24:32-33). The Olivet Discourse repays closer work than an objection can give it, beginning with the three questions the disciples put to Him at its opening (Matt. 24:3). But the answer above doesn't require that work to be finished. Whichever generation verse 34 names, the events of the five verses before it have not happened.

There is a partial preterism that holds the Olivet Discourse's near-term material was fulfilled in A.D. 70 while the return remains future, and that position is considerably harder to dismiss. This paper's disagreement with it is narrower and is essentially the disagreement of the previous objections: the events of A.D. 70 did not transfer the rule. (The texts both forms of preterism rest on, the sayings about nearness, the statements that the last days have begun, and the sayings limited to Jesus' own hearers, are taken up one at a time in the companion series *A Little While: Reading the Texts Preterism Rests On*.)

"The apostles said the end was at hand, and John was told not to seal his book"

The charge. The nearness language is not one verse but a chorus. Paul says the night is far spent and the day is at hand (Rom. 13:11-12), and that the Lord is at hand (Phil. 4:5). James says the coming of the Lord is at hand and the Judge is standing at the door (Jas. 5:8-9). Peter says the end of all things is at hand (1 Pet. 4:7). Hebrews says that in a very little while He who is coming will come and will not tarry (Heb. 10:37). John says it is the last hour (1 John 2:18). Revelation frames itself the same way, opening with things which must shortly take place and closing with a command that inverts Daniel's. Daniel was told to shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end (Dan. 12:4); John is told, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand" (Rev. 22:10). Two prophets, opposite instructions, and the stated difference between them is time. Whatever the apostles were expecting, they expected it soon, and something did happen in A.D. 70.

The answer. The language is real and it's cumulative, and any answer that makes "at hand" mean nothing has made the apostles say nothing.

Two smaller matters before the main one. Revelation's opening phrase, *en tachei*, carries speed as much as proximity; the same phrase appears when Jesus says God will avenge His elect "speedily" (Luke 18:8), of a vindication that comes suddenly rather than shortly. And sealing can't carry the weight the contrast puts on it. Daniel's book was read and understood, and Jesus cites him and tells His hearers to pay attention to what they read (Matt. 24:15), so sealing cannot mean hidden from readers. Revelation uses the word for withholding content outright: John is told to seal what the seven thunders said "and do not write them" (Rev. 10:4).

The weight of the answer rests elsewhere, in the same place the previous objection's rested. Not on what the words for nearness can bear, but on what did and did not happen.

Daniel and Revelation are measuring one period, and the correspondence is too exact to be accidental: a "seven" of years, twelve hundred and sixty days, forty-two months, a time and times and half a time. The preterist is right to join them, but what he inherits with the joining is Daniel's own account of what that period accomplishes. Seventy weeks are determined for Daniel's people and his holy city, "to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy" (Dan. 9:24). Transgression was not finished in A.D. 70, and everlasting righteousness was not brought in. Daniel says of the same period that "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). No one saw it.

There is also the manner of the coming. Full preterism answers that Christ came in judgment the way God came against Egypt riding on a swift cloud (Isa. 19:1), invisibly and through providence. The angels at the ascension fixed the terms differently: "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The manner of the return is set by the manner of the departure, and the departure was bodily and watched.

The nearness language doesn't by itself require full preterism, and the two versions need separating. A partial preterist reads it as pointing to a real and near judgment on Jerusalem while the bodily return remains ahead, and nothing above embarrasses that position. Full preterism gains consistency over it by placing the resurrection in A.D. 70 as well, and buys the consistency with a resurrection nobody witnessed and an everlasting righteousness the following centuries did not display.

"Revelation 20 is one chapter, and a symbolic one"

The charge. The entire literal millennium rests on a single chapter of the most figurative book in the canon, a book full of dragons, horns, and numbers nobody reads literally. Building a whole eschatology on it inverts the proper order of interpretation, which reads the obscure in light of the clear.

The answer. The principle is sound and this project holds it. But the premise is wrong: the millennium doesn't rest on one chapter.

The chapter that explicitly names the duration is one chapter. The kingdom itself is described across both testaments. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zechariah describe a

reign on earth with a ruler from David's line, most of them in ordinary prophetic speech rather than in visions of beasts and horns. Jesus promised the Twelve thrones in the regeneration (Matt. 19:28). Paul supplied the sequence (1 Cor. 15:23-25). Peter described a restoration of all things spoken by all the prophets (Acts 3:21). What Revelation 20 adds is a number and an order of events, not the kingdom.

The order of interpretation cuts the other way, in fact. If the clear passages describe a future reign on earth, then a chapter describing a reign on earth with a stated duration is being read in light of the clear, not against it.

"Revelation 11:15 says He shall reign forever and ever, not a thousand years"

The charge. The paper rests a great deal on Revelation 11:15 as heaven's proclamation of the transfer. But the same sentence says Christ "shall reign forever and ever." A reign without end is not a thousand-year interval. Either the verse does not say what the paper needs, or the thousand years of Revelation 20 is something other than the reign.

The answer. Both halves are true, and Scripture puts them together without strain. The reign announced at the seventh trumpet does not end. What ends after a thousand years is one arrangement of it.

Paul sets out the sequence in the same chapter this paper has already used for the order of the resurrection: "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet... The last enemy that will be destroyed is death... Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28). A kingdom delivered up and a Son made subject is a change of administration. It is not an abdication, and it is not a reign that stops.

Revelation shows what the arrangement becomes. Through the reign the thrones are two, and Christ says so: the overcomer is granted to sit with Him on His own throne, as He overcame and sat down with His Father on His (Rev. 3:21). Afterward John sees one throne carrying both names, "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1, 3). So during the thousand years Christ's throne and the Father's are two, and once the thousand years are over, John sees them as one.

So "forever and ever" attaches to the reign, and the thousand years bounds the phase in which Christ reigns on His own throne with those given place under Him. This paper's claim concerns when that reign begins, and Revelation 11:15 is heaven's proclamation of it. Nothing in the verse requires the reign to be administered the same way from beginning to end, and Paul says it isn't. The phrase itself, *eis tous aionas ton aionon*, is Scripture's word for an age doubled rather than a separate word for infinity, and what it does and does not carry is taken up in the companion paper on *aion* and *aionios*.

"That is just the gap theory"

The charge. Reading a ruin into Genesis 1:2 and calling the six days a restoration is the gap theory wearing different clothes. That view was assembled in the nineteenth century to make room for

geology inside Scripture, it requires a pre-Adamic world the text never mentions, and it turns on translating an ordinary Hebrew verb in an extraordinary way. A timetable built on that foundation inherits every problem the foundation has.

The answer. The overlap is real. Both readings take Genesis 1:1 as an original creation, both find the earth of verse 2 in a ruined condition, both trace the ruin to the fall of Satan, and both treat the six days as restorative. Anyone who has met the gap theory will recognize the shape of what this paper has said.

The differences lie in what the reading is for and what it claims. The gap theory was built to solve a dating problem. Thomas Chalmers advanced it from 1814 to reconcile Genesis with the long ages that the geology of his day had begun to require, a geology that assumed the earth's layers were laid down slowly at present-day rates; G. H. Pember gave it a full theological defense late in that century; the Scofield Reference Bible carried it to a mass readership, its note directing the reader to assign the fossils to the primitive creation; and Arthur Custance's *Without Form and Void* (1970) remains its most careful academic statement. The interval exists in that system because the geological column needs somewhere to sit.

Nothing said here asks for that or gets it. This reading makes no claim about the age of the earth, the length of any interval between the first two verses, the fossil record, or a race of men before Adam. Strike every geological question from the discussion and the argument stands where it stood, because it was never resting there. It rests on two things.

The first is the verbs. Genesis 1:1 uses *bara*, to create out of nothing. The work on the ruined domain is told with a different word, *asah*, to make or do, the word Isaiah pairs with *yatsar*, to form from material already at hand (Isa. 45:18). Light, the firmament, the dry land, and the lights in the heavens are all **made.***Bara* returns to the chapter only where something enters that the restored world didn't yet have: the living creatures of the sea and the air (Gen. 1:21), and then man in God's own image, where Moses uses the word three times in a single verse (Gen. 1:27). The domain is restored; what is new in it is created. The account's own closing lines keep the two verbs together rather than choosing between them: God rested "from all His work which God had created and made" (Gen. 2:3), and the heavens and the earth have their history "when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (Gen. 2:4), the first half reaching back to the original act of verse 1. At Sinai the week is summed up with *asah* alone: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Exod. 20:11). That verse is usually produced as the decisive argument against a gap, on the ground that it places everything inside the six days. It reads the other way once the verb is looked at. Made, not created out of nothing.

The second is Isaiah, and this is where the weight sits: "Thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18). "In vain" renders *tohu*, the same word Genesis 1:2 uses for the condition of the earth. Isaiah denies of the original act the exact condition Genesis reports one verse later.

The verb in Genesis 1:2 is weaker ground. *Hayah* ordinarily renders "was," and reading it "became" is a minority choice a critic is entitled to press. That's why the argument is anchored in Isaiah

instead. Isaiah's statement holds either way: if the earth simply *was* without form and void, Isaiah still says God didn't make it so, and the question of how it came to be that way is still on the table.

The purposes finally part company. The gap theory ends where it began, having made room for a geological timetable. This reading ends in a pattern the rest of Scripture uses — a ruined domain restored across six days with a seventh of rest, applied by Peter and by Hebrews to a second ruined creation and a rest still ahead (2 Pet. 3:8; Heb. 4:9). The timetable it produces is not borrowed from geology. It is the one Scripture builds on its own opening page.

G. H. Pember, whose *Earth's Earliest Ages* gave the gap reading its fullest theological defense, is a writer this project draws on with appreciation elsewhere, on questions that have nothing to do with Genesis 1. That illustrates a rule this paper would apply in either direction: a man's position on one question is not evidence about his position on another, and a reading is not established by the company it keeps, nor refuted by the company it resembles.

"Your case leans on typological pictures, and we don't do that"

The charge. The bride argument and the Saul-and-David argument are not exegesis. They are patterns found by an interpreter who already knew what he wanted to find. Genesis 2 is about a marriage. First Samuel is about a civil war. Neither is about Christ's reign, and reading them that way lets an interpreter prove anything from anything.

The answer. The concern is legitimate and the discipline it asks for is real. Typology without controls does prove anything, and this project's own rules require a type to be established by Scripture rather than by resemblance.

But the objection as stated is too strong, because Scripture does this itself and names it while doing it. Adam is called "a type of Him who was to come" (Rom. 5:14), where the word is *tupos*. The wilderness events "became our examples," written "for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). Baptism is called the *antitupos* of the flood (1 Pet. 3:21). The feasts and the sabbaths "are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:17), and the priesthood serves "the copy and shadow of the heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5). A reader who rules out typology has ruled out an apostolic practice, not merely a modern one.

And the objection is weakest where this paper leans hardest. The marriage type isn't one this paper had to discover. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, the verse establishing marriage, applies it to Christ and the Church, and calls it a great mystery (Eph. 5:31-32). The most that can be said against the section on the bride is that it follows Paul's own reading back into Genesis 1 and 2, further than Paul went in that passage. That is a question of how far, not of whether.

Three controls separate a type from a coincidence. A type should be identified or applied by Scripture rather than only by the interpreter; the correspondence should be structural rather than incidental; and nothing should rest on it that isn't also established elsewhere. The bride material meets the first test through Ephesians 5, and the timing conclusion it supports is independently established by Hebrews 10:13, Acts 1:6-7, and 1 Corinthians 15:23-25. The Saul and David material meets the first test on David's side, since Scripture itself gives David's name to the coming ruler: "My servant David" as the one shepherd over Israel (Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24), and "David their king" (Hos. 3:5). It meets the second on Saul's side, through the anointing Saul shares with the cherub of

Ezekiel 28, which is the structural feature and not an atmospheric one. Neither is asked to carry the argument by itself.

"Your reading of the Transfiguration is speculative"

The charge. The claim that the three disciples were brought forward in time to witness the actual future event is imaginative rather than exegetical. Jesus Himself calls it a *vision* on the way down the mountain (Matt. 17:9), which is exactly what a preview is and exactly what a time-displacement is not.

The answer. Matthew 17:9 does use *horama*, vision, and that word tells against the stronger form of the reading. The time-displacement reading is offered in this project as a possible account of what happened, resting on the observation that Scripture elsewhere shows prophets carried in the Spirit and shown things beyond their own moment (Ezek. 8:1-3; Rev. 1:10-19, 4:1-2). It is a reading, not a demonstration, and the argument of this paper does not depend on it.

What does not depend on it is the point the passage was brought in to make. Jesus said that some standing there would not taste death till they saw "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28), and six days later three of them saw Him transfigured in glory with Moses and Elijah and heard the Father's voice (Matt. 17:1-5). Whether that was a vision of the event or a witnessing of it, the promise was satisfied on Jesus' own stated timetable, for the number of people His own words implied. No substitution is needed. The mainstream alternatives, which propose Pentecost, the session, or A.D. 70, all require "coming in His kingdom" to mean something other than what it says, and all of them arrive years or decades after the words were spoken.

Two further supports stand on their own. Peter, writing near his death nearly thirty years later, still cites what he saw on that mountain as eyewitness testimony to "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," and to the honor and glory Christ received from the Father (2 Pet. 1:16-18), calling it a confirming of "the prophetic word" (2 Pet. 1:19). Prophetic and coming are both forward-facing words, used of a scene decades in his past. And the setting reinforces it: Scripture repeatedly uses a mountain to depict a kingdom, in Isaiah's mountain of the LORD's house raised above all others (Isa. 2:1-4) and in Daniel's stone that becomes a great mountain filling the earth (Dan. 2:35, 44-45). Jesus' choice of "a high mountain" (Matt. 17:1) for this particular revelation was not incidental.

Why It Matters — Downstream Effects

The timing question can look like a matter for specialists in prophecy. It isn't. What a Christian believes about when Jesus begins to reign decides how several other doctrines work, starting with the ones this series is built on.

- **The whole reward structure of this series depends on this timing.** If the kingdom is already fully present and Christ is already reigning over it, the distinction between the spirit's settled standing and the conditional salvation of the soul, with its reward of reigning alongside Christ, loses its object. There'd be no coming kingdom left to be rewarded with rulership in,

and the crowns taken up in the companion paper on the Judgment Seat would be crowns for nothing.

- **It determines what the Judgment Seat is for.** A reward tribunal has to be adjudicating something. If the reign has already begun, the Bema either becomes a formality or turns back into a destiny-deciding court, which is the collapse the companion paper on the Judgment Seat argues against.
- **It decides what to do with Israel's promises.** A present kingdom has to reassign them. A future kingdom leaves them outstanding.
- **It changes how a Christian reads the present age.** If the kingdom is now, the Church's failures are the kingdom's failures and its cultural setbacks are defeats. If the kingdom is not yet, the present age is what Scripture says it is: a period of witness, endurance, and waiting under a hostile administration, in which faithfulness is not measured by visible ascendancy.
- **It bears on how much any visible institution can claim for itself.** That the visible structure identified with the kingdom is fractured is evidence against reading the kingdom as presently and visibly in operation, on Jesus' own stated principle about divided kingdoms, with the limits noted above.

Every one of those follows from a single fork: whether the seat Jesus took at the ascension is the throne He was promised. Scripture keeps the seat and the throne apart, and all five consequences depend on keeping them there.

Conclusion

The kingdom Jesus preached is not a metaphor already fulfilled in the Church, nor a golden age unfolding through the gospel's gradual spread, nor a present possession secured at the moment of belief. It is a specific, future, visible transfer of rule, from a disqualified incumbent and his angels to Christ and His co-heirs, datable to a specific future event and nowhere yet accomplished.

Christ presently sits at the Father's right hand. That's real, and it is not the same thing as reigning over subdued enemies, because Scripture's own word for what He's doing there is *waiting* (Heb. 10:13). He names His Father's throne and His own throne in a single sentence and does not confuse them (Rev. 3:21). His apostles, forty days after the resurrection, asked when the restoration would come, and He gave them no date rather than telling them it had arrived (Acts 1:6-7). Weeks after Pentecost, Peter was still preaching that restoration as ahead (Acts 3:19-21). Paul rebuked a church for acting as though it already reigned, and said plainly that he wished it were so (1 Cor. 4:8).

The already texts, read carefully and in context, describe a real offer, a real authority, a real change of allegiance, and a real present struggle. They don't describe a kingdom already ruling on the earth. Creation still groans. Nations still bring their disputes to no one. The enemies are not yet a footstool.

"Your kingdom come" remains a fitting prayer, and an unanswered one.

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