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

Paper 3 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

A plain-language companion to Paper 3. Everything here is worked out at length there, with the Greek, the objections, and the sources.

A prayer we say without hearing it

Christians pray "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10).

Stop on that for a second. You don't ask for what you already have. Nobody prays for the sun to rise while standing in the afternoon light. The prayer only makes sense if the kingdom hasn't come yet.

That's the whole question of this paper. Is Christ reigning over this world right now, or is His reign still ahead of us?

The answer here is that it is still ahead. He has the **right** to the throne. He has been **anointed** for it. He has **not taken it yet.**

Two seats, not one

A lot of confusion clears up once you see that Scripture describes two different seats.

Right now Jesus is seated beside His Father. That's real, and the Bible says so plainly. But look at what it says He is doing there:

> "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)

Waiting. That's Scripture's own word for it. A man reigning over a conquered world is not described as waiting for his enemies to be put under his feet. He is described as ruling them. Jesus is seated, and He is waiting.

Then Jesus mentions the other seat Himself, in one sentence with both in it:

> "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)

Read that slowly. **My Father's throne** — He sat down on it already, past tense. **My throne** — still to be shared, in the future. And when He takes it, He'll rule from the heavens and on the earth together, the kingdom Scripture describes as gathering "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth" (Eph. 1:10). **Two seats. One taken, one waiting.**

A picture God already gave us

If that sounds like an odd arrangement, God put a whole story in the Old Testament to show us how it works.

Saul was king of Israel. Then God rejected him:

> "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king." (1 Sam. 15:23)

And here is the strange part. Saul kept reigning. For years. He sat on the throne, gave orders, and commanded the army — a finished king who had not been removed yet.

Meanwhile Samuel poured oil on a shepherd boy's head — **David**, and "the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). David was the real king from that moment. He just did not have the crown.

So what did David do while he waited?

He didn't grab it. Twice he had Saul cornered and helpless, and twice he refused, because removing the king was God's business and not his (1 Sam. 24:6). Instead he went out to a cave called Adullam, and people started coming to him:

> "And 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. 22:2)

They came out of Saul's own kingdom. They came to a man with no throne, no palace, and no army. And when David finally was crowned, those men were the ones given positions under him.

Look at what that picture is telling you. There is a ruler over this world who has already been sentenced and has not been removed yet. There is an anointed King who has not taken His throne. And in between, people are quietly leaving the old kingdom and gathering to Him — and where they stand when the crown finally comes will depend on what they did in the waiting.

That is not a clever illustration somebody invented. That is where we are living.

The week that sets the clock

There is a pattern on the very first page of the Bible, and once you see it you cannot unsee it.

Genesis 1:1 says God created the heavens and the earth. Then verse 2 finds that same earth wrecked — "without form, and void," dark and covered with water.

Did God make it that way? Isaiah says no:

> "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" is the same word Genesis uses for the wreck in verse 2. So God didn't make it a ruin. It **became** one. Something happened.

Which means the six days that follow are not God making a world from nothing. They are God repairing one. Moses uses the word for that kind of work: "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).

Six days of work. One day of rest. That's the pattern.

Now watch it happen a second time. God made man, gave him the job of ruling this world, and man fell before he ever took it up. Ruined again — the man himself, and the ground under him.

So how long does the repair take this time? Peter tells us the measure, and he tells it to people who were asking why Jesus hadn't come back yet:

> "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)

And Hebrews says the week isn't finished: "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9).

Six days of work at a thousand years each. Then a rest.

That is why the thousand years in Revelation 20 is not a strange number dropped into the last book of the Bible. It is **the seventh day.** It has been coming since page one.

What it will actually look like

Here is a simple test. The prophets describe the coming kingdom in detail. Read the description and ask whether you are living in it.

Nations bring their arguments to Jerusalem and God settles them. Weapons get melted down into farm tools, because war has been outlawed by the King, not talked out of people (Isa. 2:1-4). Wolves lie down with lambs (Isa. 11:6-9).

Then Isaiah says something that fits nowhere else:

> "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." (Isa. 65:20)

People still die — but a hundred-year-old is considered a child who died young. That isn't the world you live in, where infants do die. And it isn't the new heavens and earth either, where there is no death at all (Rev. 21:4). It is a third thing, and it has not happened.

Zechariah is even more concrete. The Mount of Olives splits in half when the Lord's feet land on it, and the nations that survive come up to Jerusalem year after year to keep a feast (Zech. 14:4, 16).

None of that has happened — not invisibly, not spiritually, not in some hidden sense. These are not promises about invisible things. Nations are not bringing their disputes to anyone. Nobody dies at a hundred and is called young.

The men who were there kept asking

If the kingdom started at the cross, or at the resurrection, or at Pentecost, then the apostles are the last people on earth who would still be waiting for it.

They were still waiting.

Forty days after the resurrection, standing in front of the risen Jesus, they asked Him straight out: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

That's the moment to correct them if they had it wrong. If the kingdom were already here, or if it were never going to be that kind of kingdom at all, He says so right there.

He does not. He says: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7).

He did not say *you have misunderstood.* He did not say *it is already here, in your hearts.* He refused to give them a date — and refusing to give a date admits there is one.

Weeks later, after Pentecost had come and gone, Peter was still describing Jesus as the One "whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). Heaven must *keep* Him, *until* something that had not happened yet.

One church acted like it had already arrived

The Corinthians were pleased with themselves. Paul had just warned them not to run ahead of God's schedule:

> "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." (1 Cor. 4:5)

Then. Not now. The commendation comes when He comes.

But they were living as though it had all been handed out already. So Paul says it back to them, and you can hear the sting:

> "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)

He isn't being kind there. Two *already*s, a reign they claim is already theirs, and then a picture of what the apostles were living through at that very moment: displayed last, treated as men condemned to death, hungry, homeless, reviled, "the offscouring of all things until now" (1 Cor. 4:9-13). The Corinthians felt like royalty. The men who brought them the gospel were being treated as refuse.

But look at the middle of verse 8. Paul does not say reigning is the wrong thing to want. He says he wishes it were true, so that he could reign with them.

His problem is not the hope. It is **the clock.**

What this is not

This is not saying Christ has no authority now. He has all of it. He said so Himself before He left: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). He is seated beside the Father, He is praying for His own as High Priest, and He is holding the whole thing together. Having the authority and administering the kingdom are two different things. A rightful king in exile is still the rightful king.

This is not saying nothing is happening now. A great deal is happening. People are being brought out of one kingdom and into the family of another. That is the gathering at the cave, and it is the main business of this age.

This is not date-setting. Jesus refused to give the apostles a date and told them it was not theirs to know (Acts 1:7). Saying a thing hasn't happened yet is not the same as claiming to know when it will.

Why this matters to you

If the kingdom is already here in full, then there's nothing left to be given a place in, and the promises about reigning with Christ have no object. The whole idea of a reward — a position, a responsibility, a share in His rule — needs a kingdom that has not been handed out yet.

There is also this. If the kingdom is now, then every setback the church takes is the kingdom losing, and every cultural defeat is God's rule failing. That's a crushing way to live, and it is not true.

If the kingdom is not yet, then this age is exactly what the Bible says it is: a stretch of time under a hostile ruler, where the job is to stay faithful, keep witnessing, and endure. Success isn't measured by how much ground Christianity appears to be gaining. It's measured by whether you are among those gathering to the anointed King while the other one is still on the throne.

That is what the men in the cave were doing.

Where that leaves us

Jesus is seated beside His Father, and He is waiting.

The ruler of this world has been sentenced and has not been removed.

The prophets described a reign that has not arrived. The apostles kept asking when it would. Paul rebuked a church for thinking it had. Creation is still groaning (Rom. 8:22).

And "Your kingdom come" is still a good prayer to pray — and still an unanswered one.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.