

## Concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 19:8-10)<sup>a</sup>

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### Context

1. Paul on his third missionary journey
2. Retracing much of his route on the second journey
3. Focus is not *evangelization* in new regions, but rather *discipleship*: building up the newly established churches
4. Found his way to Ephesus, where God will open a lengthy opportunity to teach—lasting over two years

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### Passage (Acts 19:8-10)

[8] And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. [9] But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. [10] And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.<sup>1</sup>

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### Focus

1. The Big Idea: The Old Testament predicts a Geo-Political Kingdom of God
2. Relevance:
  - Many Christians have been taught that, when Jesus arrived, He *redefined* the Kingdom of God from what the Old Testament had led people to expect.
  - Instead of a geopolitical kingdom, Jesus' kingdom is spiritual: in the hearts of men.
  - This spiritual kingdom will come to earth through the gradual conversion of the culture by the Church so as to submit to and follow the teachings of Christ.
  - The problem: the modern Church is increasingly focused on social issues while down-playing the need for individual salvation.

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### Paul's preaching/teaching ministry

#### 1. Acts 19:8

*[Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.*

2. **As is his well-established pattern in the Book of Acts, Paul initially preaches to the Jews**
3. **Concerning the kingdom of God**
4. **On what basis was Paul reasoning and persuading? What source of authority would be persuasive in a synagogue preaching to Jews?**
5. **The centrality of the Scriptures in evangelization and discipleship within Acts**

A. Acts [1:16](#) - Peter on the Day of Pentecost

*Men [and] brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus;*

B. Acts [8:32-35](#) - Philip with the Ethiopian Eunuch

*The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer [is] silent, So He opened not His mouth. . . ." Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.*

C. Acts [17:2-11](#) - Paul in Thessalonica

*Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures. . . . These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily [to find out] whether these things were so.*

D. Acts [18:24-28](#) - Apollos in Ephesus

*Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man [and] mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. . . . he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.*

E. Do you hear a pattern?

## 6. Things to notice:

- A. Paul is (once again) in a synagogue preaching to his Jewish brethren
- B. He is *reasoning* and *persuading*
- C. On the basis of *the Scriptures*
- D. Concerning *the kingdom of God*

## 7. What Scriptures?

- A. Remember, there is no New Testament as of yet
- B. Paul is appealing to the Old Testament

### C. Specifically: what the Old Testament says concerning *the kingdom of God*

#### 8. That's very interesting! Why?

A. Because some Christians today tell us that Old Testament teaching concerning the kingdom of God is *misleading and incorrect*

##### I. Greg Beale

Perhaps one of the most striking features of Jesus' kingdom is that it appears not to be the kind of kingdom prophesied in the OT and expected by Judaism<sup>2</sup>

Mark 10:45 depicts Jesus as beginning to fulfill the Daniel prophecy [7:13] in an apparently different way than prophesied . . . in a hitherto unexpected manner<sup>3</sup>

The word ["mystery"] . . . when so linked with OT allusions, is used to indicate that prophecy is beginning fulfillment but in an unexpected manner in comparison to the way Old Testament readers might have expected<sup>4</sup>

##### II. Gareth Reese

The design of John [the Baptist]'s preaching was to turn the people from their sins and to prepare the for the coming of] Messiah (not only their changed lives, but by getting them to change their minds about the type of coming kingdom it was to be<sup>5</sup>

9. **How far do you suppose Paul would get with Jews by telling them the Old Testament needed to be reinterpreted to understand what it *really* predicted?**

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### Meaning of the kingdom in the NT cannot be divorced from its meaning in the OT

#### 1. Jesus and John begin preaching the kingdom without explanation

A. Mat. 3:1-2 - John the Baptist: "kingdom of heaven is at hand"

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"*

B. Mat. 4:17 - Jesus: "kingdom of heaven is at hand"

*From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

#### 2. How would their listeners have understood what was meant?

A. Neither provide much by way of explanation

B. They expect an immediate response by their listeners

C. They don't had the luxury of listening to three years of Jesus' teaching before responding

D. John and Jesus don't explain what is meant because they hold their *Jewish* listeners to be responsible for knowing the *Jewish* Scriptures — the OT

### 3. Understanding God's revelation

#### A. Fundamentals concerning God

I. God does not lie—therefore He cannot mislead

II. God invented language with the intention that it be *sufficient* for His purposes

III. God chose to encode His communication to man in both spoken, but especially *written* format — the Scriptures

#### B. *Perspicuity* of Scripture

I. The doctrine of the *clarity of Scripture*

II. Westminster Confession of Faith (A. D. 1647)

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (2 Pet. 3:16).<sup>6</sup>

III. Of particular importance: the way of salvation = obtaining eternal life, avoiding eternal damnation

#### C. *Perspicuity* must extend further than merely the way of salvation

I. Mankind is held responsible, culpable for a right response to God's revelation beyond the way of salvation

#### II. Pleasing God

a. How can we obey His commandments in order to live in the manner He intends unless we understand them?

b. How can we be responsible for understanding prophecies He has made unless we understand what is being said?

D. Through Scripture, God is *revealing* not *obscuring* (ἀποκάλυψις [*apokalypsis*] = unveiling, uncovering, revealing)

## E. Gods' revelation is *progressive*

- I. God reveals, clarifies, adds additional information *as time progresses*
- II. The various books of the OT were written in historical progression
- III. The sum of what they reveal grows throughout the era of the OT
- IV. By the time of Jesus' arrival, the OT canon contained everything God intended man to know *in order to rightly respond to the presentation of Jesus as promised Messiah/King*
- V. Improper use of progressive revelation
  - a. An approach which takes the NT as *necessary* in order to understand the OT
  - b. The NT is *read back* into the OT, and *redefines* the plain-sense meaning one would already have from reading the OT on its own
  - c. The OT is insufficient revelation on its own
  - d. During the silent years between the close of the OT and opening of the NT, people really had no way of knowing what to expect
  - e. The NT not only *clarifies* the OT (and this it most surely does!), but this view says it *changes* the meaning of what was written earlier!
  - f. If this were true . . .
    - i. . . . how could first-century hearers of John and Jesus be held accountable for recognizing Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and responding accordingly?
    - ii. . . . how could they be responsible if His role as king and especially, an understanding of the kingdom of God were shrouded in symbolism and mystery?
  - g. It simply will not do to say that what Jesus meant and preached could only be properly understood after the arrival of the NT — which had not yet been written

## VI. Proper use of progressive revelation

- a. The OT is a “dimly lit ornate room” and the NT provides light to see more details
- b. Switching the light on does not rearrange the furniture causing couches and chairs to disappear and completely new furniture to appear in its place

- c. Progressive revelation enables us to see more clearly—some shadowy areas which were previously “dimly lit”
- d. Clarifies, enhances, adds-to, but can never change the foundational meaning
- e. If it does: God is either misleading or a poor communicator!
- f. John MacArthur interview with Ben Shapiro

I am a Christian because of the Old Testament. Without the Old Testament, I don't know if I could believe the New Testament. . . . How do I know that Jesus is the Messiah if I don't have all the predictions of the Old Testament defining Him when He shows up? . . . You can't possibly tell me that God didn't mean what He said. That is one of the reasons why I'm an originalist. It's very popular in Christianity today to say, “the Old Testament is interpreted by the New Testament.” That's not true. Because if that's the case, then nobody in the Old Testament had any idea what was going on! . . . That's not revelation, that's obfuscation, that's just a pile of riddles.<sup>7</sup>

- g. Notice what John MacArthur is saying: *the Old Testament serves as an anchor, a sure guide, for understanding the meaning of the New Testament —not the other way around*

#### 4. A geopolitical kingdom or a spiritual kingdom?

- A. But, some will argue, the OT paints the picture of a geopolitical kingdom and that's not the type of kingdom Jesus came to establish!

The primary difference between the post- and amillennial view on the one hand and the premillennial view on the other as regards the Kingdom has to do with whether or not the Kingdom is spiritual in nature, now present in the hearts of men, the outward manifestation of which is the Church, or whether it is political and economic, absent from the earth at the present time but to be established in outward form when Christ returns.<sup>8</sup>

- B. False dichotomy: *either* spiritual *or* political and economic

- I. Here we see hints of philosophy called gnosticism

- a. God only cares about that which is *spiritual*
- b. *Spiritual* things are the deeper things
- c. The *material* realm—especially lest tasteful aspects like politics and economics—are below God's interest

- II. But God is not constrained by this either-or dichotomy

- a. He created both the physical/material and spiritual reality
- b. He is intensely interested in justice “on the ground” — not just spiritual transformation, but the redemption of His entire creation, *even politics!*
- c. Gen. [1:31](#)

*Then God saw **everything** that He had made, and indeed [it was] very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*

### III. Spiritual is ultimately meaningless if it has no result in the physical realm

- a. Alva McClain - The Greatness of the Kingdom

We can have no quarrel with the dictum of writers who insist that the Kingdom is a ‘spiritual’ matter, unless they insist upon a definition which is exclusively Platonic, or if they are so foolish as to deny that a spiritual kingdom can function tangibly in a world of sense experience. As a matter of fact, it would be wrong to say that the Kingdom of Old Testament prophecy is *basically ‘spiritual,’* yet a Kingdom producing tangible effects in every area of human life.<sup>9</sup>

- b. God owns both realms, why would He settle for only a “kingdom in your heart”?

### C. The Apostles clearly expected a geopolitical kingdom associated with the nation Israel

- I. Acts [1:6](#) - The Apostles ask a question

*Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

- II. Here’s the question before us: *were their expectations misguided, wrong?*

### D. Expectations of a geopolitical kingdom were not wrong

- I. Why? Because that’s the plain-sense understanding any reader of the OT would obtain
- II. God is not a misleading God
- III. OT meaning cannot remain unknowable for hundreds of years until NT is eventually written

## 5. Why does one’s view of the nature of the kingdom matter?

- A. *When* does the kingdom arrive?

- I. Did it arrive at the first coming of Jesus?

II. Was the kingdom established at the crucifixion of Jesus?

III. Or is the kingdom still absent—to be established at His second coming?

B. *How* does the kingdom arrive?

I. If the kingdom was established at the first coming, is it now in the process of gradually filling the earth, chipping away at the secular/Gentile kingdoms little-by-little?

II. Does the kingdom gradually subsume the kingdoms of this world until the entire world is transformed through the power and influence of believers?

III. Or does the kingdom arrive cataclysmically, as a thief in the night — with severe judgments upon an unconverted Christ-rejecting world?

C. *What* is the job of the Church in this age?

I. Is the Church bringing in the kingdom?

II. Is Christ ruling today on His throne through the Church?

III. Is the Church's mandate primarily the *transformation of society*, the rectification of social ills ushering in a golden age of morality and justice?

IV. Or is the Church's mandate *individual redemption*: saving the lost by faithfully preaching the gospel, redeeming a people from the midst of a rebellious world which has no intention of converting en-mass to Christ?

D. *Israel* - is the kingdom now given to the Church, supplanting Israel's expectations?

I. Acts [1:6](#)

*Lord, will You [ever] restore the kingdom to Israel?*

II. Is the church the "new Israel"?

III. Or is Israel what it has always been: a geopolitical reality within the plan of God?

E. If we get this wrong . . .

I. We will place greater focus on political and social activities than on preaching the gospel

a. We'll be tempted to suppress aspects of the gospel which are unpopular or divisive—in order to gain accepted and to join hands with other non-Christian groups working for social reform (e.g., Mormons, Jews, Muslims)

- b. We'll invert God's priorities: placing social restoration above personal redemption
  - c. We'll confuse our work in the present (the redemption of society and the planet) for that which only God will do in the future
- II. We won't understand the kingdom offer to Israel by Jesus in the gospels — that the kingdom, having been offered and rejected—is now in a state of postponement until Israel recognizes her Messiah
  - III. We'll see ourselves as supplanting Israel in the plan of God—and we'll increasing side with the God-rejecting world in its views of Israel and Jerusalem: ultimately winding up on the wrong side of what God is doing prophetically in our times
  - IV. We are more likely to conclude that the Book of Revelation is a veiled political document describing events associated with Nero and early Rome — not having relevance for the future

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## Kingdom expectations from the OT

Many passages in the OT reveal aspects of the kingdom of God. We only have time to touch on a few.

### 1. Psalm 2:1-9

*Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'"*

- A. Do you see any geopolitical expectations arising from this passage?
- B. Nations, kings of the earth oppose the divinely-appointed King
- C. This is not speaking about mankind in general—individuals who reject Christianity and some kingdom in our hearts—no it specifically highlights a contest of *ruling authorities*
  - I. *Kings of the earth* and *rulers* are the ones opposing the Divine King
  - II. They are non-believers rejecting the rule of the divinely appointed King
  - III. Not in their hearts — in real geopolitical material reality
    - a. As one commentary puts it: "Verse 3 records the nations' resolution: they wished to be free of the political control of this king."<sup>10</sup>

D. The divine King is said to be installed on “my Holy hill of Zion”

I. Not in the hearts of men

II. In a geographic location - the Temple Mount in Jerusalem

E. The divine King will possess the nations and the ends of the earth

I. Nations - political entities

II. Ends of the earth - geographical region

F. The nations do not willingly submit

I. Broken with a road of iron

II. Dashed to pieces

III. This doesn't sound like the gradual conversion of the world through the centuries long toil of the Church

## 2. Zechariah 14

A. Zec. 14:9

*And the LORD shall be King over all the earth.*

B. Zec. 14:11

*Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited*

C. Zec. 14:16-18

*And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

I. Nations, Jerusalem, Egypt - sounds very geographical and political to me!

## 3. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Metallic Statue (Daniel 2) and Daniel's Vision of the Beasts (Daniel 7)

A. The sequences of metals and beasts in these parallel passages represent a sequence of *geopolitical* kingdoms: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome

- B. The sequence of geopolitical kingdoms abruptly comes to an end through the sudden interdiction of God's kingdom—a kingdom which does not originate with men (represented by the stone cut *without hands*, *Dan. 2:45*)
- C. Are we to suppose that the kingdoms which end are *geopolitical*, but the one which takes their place is *spiritual*? The former holding sway in the “real” world, but the latter being a secret kingdom “in our heart”?

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## The fundamental error

1. **The Old Testament is the source for Jewish expectations that God's kingdom will be geopolitical—not just a spiritual reality in the hearts of men**

2. **The issue is one of *timing* and *incomplete expectations***

A. The Jews who missed Jesus

- I. Made the mistake of not paying attention to many other OT passages which indicated that the Messiah would suffer and die
- II. They overemphasized the geopolitical aspect and minimized or ignored the spiritual work which the King would also do as Prophet and Priest
- III. Their expectations of their king were not wrong, but askew, out-of-balance
- IV. Even John the Baptist suffered from this incomplete expectation
  - a. Mat. [11:3](#)

*Are you the coming One, or do we look for another?*
  - b. Jesus responded by citing Old Testament passages which predicted the works He was doing (Mat. [1:4-5](#))
- V. In essence, they were looking for a *Second Coming* Messiah at His *First Coming*

B. The Church

- I. Makes the mistake of thinking the Jews made a *category* mistake rather than a *timing* mistake — that the Jews never should have expected a geopolitical King and that they'll never have such a promised kingdom
- II. Partly out of reaction for the error of the Jews overemphasizing Second Coming expectations, the Church does the opposite — focusing so heavily on Jesus' *First Coming* ministry, it obfuscates or subverts a proper understanding of his *Second Coming* ministry
- III. Along the way, the Church also derails Israel's promises — to be fulfilled at the *Second Coming* — and tries to apply them to herself following the *First Coming*

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## Endnotes:

1. [NKJV](#), Acts [19:8-10](#)
2. [BEALE](#), 431 (emphasis mine)
3. [BEALE](#), 195 (emphasis mine)
4. [BEALE](#), 202 (emphasis mine)
5. [Ref-1350](#), 670 (emphasis mine)
6. [Ref-0902](#), 3:604
7. [MACARTHUR](#), December 2, 2018
8. [Ref-0864](#), 284 (emphasis mine)
9. [Ref-0183](#), 221
10. [Ref-0038](#), 1:791 (Ps. [2:3](#), emphasis mine)

## Sources:

- BEALE** [G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*.]
- MACARTHUR** John MacArthur on the *Ben Shapiro Show*, [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak-Rv08N\\_1Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak-Rv08N_1Q)]
- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0183** Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness Of The Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974, c1959).
- Ref-0864** Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, ID=2008092001.
- Ref-0902** Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (n.p.: 1819-1893).
- Ref-1350** Gareth L. Reese, *New Testament History: Acts* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1976). ISBN:[0-89900-055-X<sup>d</sup>](#).

## Links Mentioned Above

- a - See [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/67\\_Acts\\_19\\_8-10/index.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/67_Acts_19_8-10/index.htm).
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-89900-055-X>.