

Are We In the Kingdom?

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

Yeshua ministered throughout all Judea, Samaria, and the Galilee, saying: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”* (Matthew 3:2, NKJV).ⁱ Was He inferring that the Kingdom of God had arrived and that we are now living in it? Not exactly.

Dispensational theologians believe in a progression of God’s revelation of Himself and His Kingdom to the creation. They define four phases of God’s unfolding story for humanity: creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration. While Dispensationalism provides a relatively straightforward narrative, it fails to accurately portray the more complex nuances of God’s individually directed divine providence of the Creator’s constant and ongoing contact with His created beings.ⁱⁱ

Therefore, we need to understand that the Kingdom of God is both inwardly personal and outwardly communal. It is inwardly in terms of our personal salvation and outwardly as Christ’s church (*ecclesia*) and the family of God. We also need to recognize that God’s redemptive and restorative plans for His Kingdom are intricately woven through time.

Zacharias prayed: *“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David”* (Luke 1:69-69). And Peter said, *“You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Unquestionably, we are living in God’s dispensation of redemption (salvation). But we also read, *“That He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 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 3:20-21). Therefore, the question is: When does God’s times of restoration begin? We will explore both Classical and Progressive Dispensational theology to answer this question.

Some theologians view God’s redemption and restoration as concurrent, while others feel they are successive. I am not a strong advocate for dispensationalism, as I will point out in this teaching. However, using dispensationalism as a theological exegesis will help us explore God’s times of restoration for His Kingdom.

There is little argument in Orthodox Christianity that God created a perfect heaven and earth. The pinnacle of His creation was Adam and Eve, who He formed in His image. Christians believe that Adam and Eve disobeyed God, causing humanity to fall from the Garden of Eden into a world filled with sin and death.

Christians believe that in the fullness (dispensation) of time, Christ came, born of a virgin, lived a perfect, sinless life, and willingly gave His life on the cross so that all who receive in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. And Christians believe that Jesus rose from the grave and ascended to the right hand of the Father and that Christ is physically returning to establish His eternal Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.ⁱⁱⁱ

Physically returning means, you would be able to take a photograph of Jesus. As we read, *“And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? 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 1:10-11).

Theologians differ about the timing of Christ’s return, but their arguments are about when not if. Therefore, while understanding these differences is essential, and only one of these opinions is Biblically accurate, none is heretical. We all believe that Christ is returning.

John Nelson Darby (A.D. 1800-1882), an Anglo-Irish Bible teacher, derived a new premillennial theology called “dispensationalism” (Classical Dispensationalism). Later, Classical Dispensationalism branched into Ultra Dispensationalism (the late 1800s), Revised Dispensationalism (1950s), and Progressive Dispensationalism (1980s). In this study, we will utilize Classical Dispensationalism held by Scofield and Chafer and touch on Progressive Dispensationalism held by Bock and Blaising.^{iv}

While all dispensational theologies address the human condition of sin and our need for Christ’s redemption, Classical Dispensationalism is expressly God-centered, not man-centered. Its doxological focus sees the ultimate purpose of redemption and restoration as God bringing glory to Himself. Just as the Lord spoke to Israel, *“For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; For how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another”* (Isaiah 48:11).

Not even Israel, God’s covenant people, and certainly not the Gentiles who were outside of God’s covenant promises were deserving of God’s unmerited grace. Yet, that is precisely what we *all* have received from the Lord. For this reason, just as Paul declared, *“I [also] am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek”* (Romans 1:16). For, *“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for [we] are all one [and equal] in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28).

Classical Dispensationalism (futurism) holds to a literal interpretation of scripture, dividing history into ages or dispensations, and teaching that Christ’s Kingdom will not be established

here on earth until He returns—the dispensation of restoration. Jesus said, *“I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Matthew 26:64). And in Revelation, we read, *“Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’”* (Revelation 11:15).

Classical Dispensationalism also holds to a literal premillennial view and one-thousand-year reign of Christ before the new heaven and earth. As we read, *“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison”* (Revelation 20:6-7).

Some scholars argue that this one verse in the Bible is insufficient by itself to justify a literal one-thousand-year Kingdom. And yet, not surprisingly, even in Jewish thought, the sages in the Talmud teach that the creation will exist for six thousand years before the universal Sabbath and one-thousand-year Messianic era.^v

The rabbis label the first two thousand years as “the hidden years,” beginning at creation and lasting until Abraham. The following two thousand years of “revelation,” they say, include the Patriarchs, the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and the two Temples in Jerusalem. And the final two thousand years they consider as “preparation” of the Jewish people for the redemption of the Messiah, balanced between Divine concealment and revelation.

Thus, it is not coincidental that Yeshua said, *“If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes”* (Luke 19:42). And Paul said, *“Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in”* (Romans 11:25).

These two verses in Luke and Romans are critical as they point to a dispensation of time when Israel would remain blind to her Messiah. Therefore, in returning to our opening question, if Yeshua preached that the Kingdom of God was at hand, did He also imply that the restoration of Israel, God’s Kingdom, had also already begun? Or would Israel’s restoration, and hence the restoration of God’s Kingdom, not occur until Yeshua returned? Let us see what scripture says.

Debuting in the 1990s from evangelical scholars Craig Blaising and Darrel Bock, a reinterpreted form of dispensationalism called Progressive Dispensationalism emerged. It sought to explain an “already-not yet” and “both-and” eschatology regarding the timing of God’s Kingdom. It also teaches that the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants are progressively fulfilled today and wholly fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom. Therefore, the theology includes a present fulfillment of God’s covenants made with historic Israel within the church.^{vi} This creates a scriptural problem.

If the fulfillment of these covenants made with historical Israel is a present condition within the church, then we should expect to see the restoration of Israel, and hence, God’s Kingdom even

before Christ returns. But this is not what the Bible says. We read, *“For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, A remnant of them will return; The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness” (Isaiah 10:22).*

While Paul did say, *“All Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob’” (Romans 11:26)*, it is evident he was speaking of the time of Christ’s return. Then, he says, Christ will deliver the entire remnant of Israel who survives the great tribulation—the time of Jacob’s trouble—as we read, *“Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, But he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7).*^{vii}

These scriptures in Romans and Jeremiah support a Classical Premillennial Dispensational view of Israel’s restoration. In other words, Israel will remain blind until they see Him coming in the clouds with power and great glory, and only then will they look upon the one who they pierced (crucified) and repent.^{viii}

On the other hand, some scholars see the rebirth of Israel in 1948 and the recapturing of the Temple Mount in 1967 as evidence of Biblical fulfillment and a partial restoration of God’s Kingdom. However, more than sixty percent of Israel’s population today is secular, with only about one-third of one percent of the people even believing that Jesus-Yeshua is the Messiah. Israel is far from the theocracy God established through the Mosaic Covenant and certainly nowhere close to the promised Davidic dynasty. Instead, Israel is a socialist democracy.

Progressive Dispensationalism is problematic because it blurs the lines between the church and Israel. It correctly recognizes the “one new man” in Ephesians chapter 2 as a continuation of believing Israelites in the Old Testament, along with Jewish and Gentiles Christians as “one people of God.” But it fails to recognize that Gentiles and Israelites are distinct people groups, each with their unique callings and Biblical promises.

God’s covenants were made with historic Israel, as Paul said, *“My brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises” (Romans 9:3-4).* Therefore, Gentile participation in the New Covenant is only a present and partial assurance of the future promises of God’s Kingdom. The full realization of which cannot occur until *all* Israel repents and the Lord forgives her sins and heals her land—Israel’s final and complete redemption and restoration. Thus, we read, *“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people” (Deuteronomy 32:43).*

Progressive Dispensationalism cannot fully align with scripture unless viewed through a different lens, one that blurs the lines between the church and Israel, and worse. It can lead to a false belief that the church has somehow replaced Israel. If restoration of the Kingdom is *not* predicated on the repentance of Israel, then Progressive Dispensationalism *does* work in that the

Kingdom is now being restored through the church, which replaces Israel as the “new Israel.” This belief is called Supersessionism or replacement theology.

Supersessionism is embraced by Amillennial, Postmillennial, and Preterist theologies. And more recently, it is subtly appearing in contemporary beliefs, such as Progressive Dispensationalism. Dr. Keith A. Mathison, professor of systematic theology at Reformation Bible College, agrees with the premise in saying, *“Progressive dispensationalists have moved closer to Reformed theology on a number of doctrines. They now acknowledge that the Kingdom has been inaugurated and that there is a present as well as a future aspect of the Kingdom.”*

Postmillennial and Preterist theologies are all rooted in Amillennialism and Supersessionism. Amillennial theology emerged from the influential writing of Saint Augustine of Hippo (Latin name Aurelius Augustinus, A.D. 354-430). Augustine shaped the practice of biblical exegesis, laying the foundation for Roman Catholicism and modern Christian thought.^{ix} Extensively reading Platonic texts to understand their doctrine, Augustine redefined Christianity as a rival and replacement for these ancient Greek philosophers.

In his book, *City of God*, a massive volume of work that took Augustine about twelve years to complete (A.D. 413–426), he redefines his understanding of the one-thousand-year Millennial Kingdom of Christ. Augustine had previously viewed the Millennium as a literal future one thousand years but changed his beliefs, incorrectly presuming the Millennium began at the First Advent of Christ. Augustine also incorrectly predicted that the binding of Satan would be complete by the year A.D. 650 and that Christ would return at that time—the Second Advent.

Augustine believed that the church saints presently reign with Christ on earth inferiorly. And one day in the future, in the fullness of Christ’s coming Kingdom, those who have been blessed by God the Father will reign in a superior way to this present age.^x

Augustine’s anti-Donatist polemic held a distinct role in creating the governing relationship between the church and state, arguing for a universal church against local particularism (independent self-governing states). Donatism was the primary form of Christianity in Africa, where Augustine spent most of his life.^{xi} The outcome of this polemic was the formation and rise to power of the Roman Catholic Church and its subservient relationship with the Roman Empire. The hierarchy of this newly restructured church not only reflected the organization of the Roman Empire, but its ecclesiastical councils also functioned like parliaments that embodied its philosophical wisdom and civil laws.^{xii}

Augustinian Amillennialism became the prevailing doctrine of the Roman Church. After the reformation, and for almost fifteen hundred years, Amillennialism remained the dominant theology for most Christians in the West. Martin Luther likewise rejected the future Millennial Kingdom and interpreted Revelation chapter 20 as a description of the historical church rather than the end of history. Amillennialism regained prominence in the West after World War II.

If the church is the "new Israel," then all the covenant promises made with historic Israel are presently being fulfilled through the church. The church is now God's vessel to establish His inwardly personal Kingdom (salvation) and His outwardly communal Kingdom (*ecclesia*) on earth as it is in heaven. In arguing for a universal church, here on earth and in heaven, Augustine institutionalized the Roman Catholic Church with its false Amillennial and Supersessionist theologies.

Unfortunately, the reformers did not abandon this theology. With its revival in the 1950s, Amillennialism became the driving force behind the emergence of Realized Eschatology, supporting liberal ideologies, including Nicholas Wright's (A.D. 1948) Kingdom Now theology (a branch of Dominionism). Dominionism was central to Christian Reconstructionism in the 1960s, the rise of Christian Nationalism in the 1970s, and the establishment of the Christian Coalition in the 1980s.

Amillennialism and its underlying Supersessionist foundation (replacement theology) have been the most damaging theologies to infiltrate the church. While Amillennialism does not deny Christ, it perverts His Kingdom. Instead of retaining the centrality of Christ's work in bringing unsaved Israel to repentance and subsequently His Second Advent, the church has partly, or entirely spiritualized God's covenant promises for Israel and has nullified their purpose in the restoration of Christ's Kingdom. Additionally, the church has built an earthly empire apart from God's covenant people and worse. The church became an instrument of Satan for the persecution and indiscriminate murder of the Jewish people in the name of Christ.

Augustine Amillennialism has led to many other unbiblical theologies, including Postmillennialism, Preterism, Inaugurated Eschatology, and more. When incorporated with Supersessionism (replacement theology), they all pervert God's Kingdom by nullifying His covenant promises for Israel. D. Matthew Allen said, *"The eschatological shift in the ancient church from Premillennialism to Amillennialism began when the church lost its understanding of Israel as a uniquely chosen people of God with specific promises of God yet to be fulfilled."*^{xiii}

The restoration of Israel, and thus, the restoration of God's Kingdom, is predicated on the return of the Jewish people to the land God promised to Abraham. And these promises cannot presently be fulfilled through the church. Yeshua's First Advent and ministry were exclusively focused on Israel's repentance, as He said, *"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 15:24). *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel"* (Mark 1:15).

Therefore, we surmise that the rebirth of Israel in 1948 was for this purpose—to bring the Jewish people back to their land, and after that, to bring them to repentance. And this is where a rigid application of Classical Dispensationalism unravels because we perceive that God, to a degree, is starting to redeem and restore Israel and His Kingdom, even before the Second Advent. This is also where Progressive Dispensationalism, if not tainted by Amillennial or Supersessionist

theology, brings a contemporary perspective and understanding of Biblical prophecy that John Darby could not have foreseen.

We read in Isaiah, *"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem'" (Isaiah 2:2-3).*

The Mountain of the Lord's house is unquestionably a reference to His Kingdom, and He says that His Kingdom will be established in the "latter days" in Jerusalem. Is the Lord speaking of a time leading up to His return? Or is He referring to a period of "latter days" that will be fulfilled after He returns? The answer depends on whether we hold a Classical or Progressive Dispensational view.

Classical Dispensationalism holds to God's covenant promises for Israel but only realizes those promises to be fulfilled when Christ returns. Nothing suggests any repentance or restoration of Israel before then. Yet, we saw the rebirth of Israel in 1948, the recapturing of Jerusalem in 1967, and an explosion of Jews coming to faith in Yeshua in the 1960s and 1970s. Paul said, *"Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5).* Could it be that we will see another explosive revival coming to the Jewish people, and subsequently, the Gentile nations before Christ returns, even before the rapture? The Lord only knows.

On the other hand, Progressive Dispensationalism revises the core tenants of Dispensationalism and sees, at least, a partial fulfillment of God's covenant promises for Israel through the church. While it sees Israel and the church as uniquely different, it also suggests that the church, to a degree, supplants Israel. In other words, it teaches that Israel both symbolizes the church, and at the same time, it also sees Israel as distinct from the church. This is not very clear.

Paul said that the present believing remnant of Israel exemplifies the future, full inclusion of unsaved Israel, and the Gentiles are grafted into Israel through the spiritual promises given to Abraham. We read, *"For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches" (Romans 11:15-16).*

He says that Israel's restoration is the key to unlocking all the covenant promises for the church, including those the Gentiles share with Israel.^{xiv} And the key to unlocking Israel's restoration is the believing remnant of Israel who is presently in Christ. If the Jewish remnant (in Christ) is holy, and the foundation of the church is holy (the fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—Christ connecting all the branches), then so are the branches holy (sanctified), including unsaved Israel.^{xv}

Paul used the analogy of a cultivated Olive tree, saying, *“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace”* (Romans 11:5). This remnant that God has preserved sanctifies all the branches so that Christ would redeem the entire Olive tree and restore His Kingdom in the fullness of time. We read, *“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘THE DELIVERER WILL COME OUT OF ZION, AND HE WILL TURN AWAY UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB’* (Romans 11:25-26).

Therefore, it appears that neither Classical nor Progressive Dispensationalism fully aligns with scripture. One sees no restoration of the Kingdom before the Second Advent, keeping Israel and the church as entirely separate and distinct people groups. And the other sees a partial fulfillment of the covenant promises for historic Israel through the church, which is primarily Gentile, suggesting that the church has somehow replaced Israel.

There is only one logical and biblically accurate explanation. Israel’s salvation is predicated on a remnant of the Jewish people whom God has sovereignly redeemed and made holy to sanctify and set apart unsaved Israel for her final restoration, ultimately for God’s glory. Therefore, we see an overlap or concurrent partial fulfillment of God’s redemption and restoration of Israel, beginning at the First Advent. God never ended His plans for Israel, nor did He cease to work towards her final restoration. As we read, *“Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep”* (Psalm 121:4).

The disciples and early apostles were all Jewish, and God’s covenant promises for historic Israel can only be presently and partially fulfilled through the remnant of Israelites that have come to faith in Christ. The Gentiles who are grafted into the cultivated Olive tree *do* share in God’s covenant promises but cannot fulfill Israel’s covenant promises without their saved remnant.

Thus, we read, *“Then one of the seven angels... showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God... She had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel... Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”* (Revelation 21:9-14).

In returning to our opening questions: When do God’s *times of restoration* begin, and has the Kingdom arrived as some scholars claim?

Of course, Christ has not returned yet to establish His Kingdom. But if “the latter days” in Isaiah refers to a season of restoration leading up to the Second Advent, then, I believe, a remnant of Jewish believers with their Gentile brothers and sister in Christ will re-establish the church like it was in the first century. And a remnant of the nations will go up to Jerusalem to learn God’s law and walk in His paths even before Christ returns. Even though Christ has not yet come, His Kingdom, to a degree, will be revealed to the nations through His church. Not a church that

replaces or rejects Israel, but one that embraces and joins in God's prophetic and redemptive plans for her.

When Yeshua came, He declared that the Kingdom of God was at hand, meaning it had arrived. Yes, the Kingdom now presently dwells—inwardly—within the heart of every believer. The Kingdom has also come outwardly as Christ's church (*ecclesia*) and the family of God. But the Kingdom cannot be fully realized until all unsaved Israel repents and returns to the Lord. And we know that time will not happen until Christ returns and every eye sees Him coming in the clouds with power and great glory. And yet, even at this present time, God has preserved for Himself a remnant of Israel according to grace. This remnant will keep all the branches Holy so that in the fullness of time, God will restore the unsaved branches of Israel and thereby establish His eternal Kingdom through her.

Again, the church has not replaced Israel, nor is she to establish a political-spiritual earthly kingdom that mistakenly unites with Israel's or the world's secular governments. No, the church has been called out of this world from every tongue, tribe, nation, and people, and she has been made holy, sanctified, and set apart for God's glory and His Kingdom.^{xvi}

I am also not suggesting that the nations begin to follow specific laws given to Israel, such as circumcision. However, regarding the Sabbath and God's holy convocations, the church will join Israel in celebrating these festivals for eternity. As we read, *"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"* (Zechariah 14:16).

In the fulness of time, when the full number of Gentiles is complete, and when the gospel has been preached in every nation, the end will come, and Christ will return and redeem the entire remnant of unsaved Israel and the Gentiles that survive the tribulation. As we read, *"In that day," says the LORD, "I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast And those whom I have afflicted; I will make the lame a remnant, And the outcast a strong nation; So the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion From now on, even forever"* (Micah 4:6-7).

Amen!

ⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

ⁱⁱ *Lesson in the Tanya—Iggeret HaKodesh, middle of Epistle 25*. The Tanya of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, elucidated by Rabbi Yosef Wineberg. Translated from Yiddish by Rabbi Levy Wineberg and Rabbi Sholom B. Wineberg. Edited by Uri Kaploun. Published and copyrighted by Kehot Publication Society. Chabad.org.

ⁱⁱⁱ Acts 2:33.

^{iv} Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (A.D. 1843-1921). Lewis Sperry Chafer (A.D. 1871-1952). Darrell L. Bock (A.D. 1953). Craig A. Blaising (A.D. 1949).

^v Davidson, Baruch S. *What is the significance of the year 6000 in the Jewish calendar?* Chabad.org.

^{vi} Price, Randall – World of the Bible Ministries. *The Changing Face of Dispensationalism*. Published in Israel My Glory. March-April 2018.

^{vii} Psalm 20:1. Jeremiah 30:7.

^{viii} Matthew 26:64. Zechariah 12:10. John 19:37.

^{ix} St. Augustine, Christian bishop, and theologian. Encyclopedia Britannica.

^x Write, David. *Amillennialism: Millennium Today*. Christian History, Christianity Today.

^{xi} Tilley, Maureen and Ramsey, Boniface. *The Donatist Controversy I*, *The Works of Saint Augustine*. New City Press. 1939-2002.

^{xii} Gay, Toby. *The Influence of the Roman Empire on the Catholic Church*. *Retrospect Journal*, Edinburgh University's History, Classics and Archaeology Magazine.

^{xiii} Ryrie Study Bible.

^{xiv} Romans 11:15.

^{xv} Romans 9:5.

^{xvi} Revelation 5:9, 7:9.