

CHAPTER VIII

THE KINGDOM, ISRAEL, AND THE CHURCH

THE most difficult aspect of the Biblical teaching of the Kingdom of God is its relationship to Israel and the Church. The difficulty rests in the fact that this relationship is not explicitly set forth in Scripture but must be inferred. As a result, utterly divergent interpretations have been suggested by equally devout students of the Bible.

The preceding chapters have expounded the thesis that the Kingdom of God in the New Testament is the redemptive work of God active in history for the defeat of His enemies, bringing to men the blessings of the divine reign. This approach enables us to interpret consistently the question of Israel and the Church in the New Testament.

It cannot be denied that Jesus offered the Kingdom to Israel. When he sent his disciples upon their preaching mission, he told them not to go among the Gentiles but to "go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10: 6). Jesus rebuffed a Canaanitish woman with the words, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15: 24). Furthermore, our Lord spoke of the Jews as the "sons of the Kingdom" (Matt. 8: 12), even though they were rejecting the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. They were the sons of the Kingdom because it was Israel whom God had chosen and to whom He had promised the blessings of the Kingdom. The Kingdom was theirs by right of election, history, and heritage. So it was that our Lord directed His ministry to them and offered to them that which had been promised them. When Israel rejected the Kingdom, the blessings which should have been theirs were given to those who would accept them.

This is seen in the sequence of verses in Matthew 11. The age of the law and the prophets ended with John the Baptist; since then the Kingdom of heaven has been at work among men. This

is the most likely meaning of Matt. 11: 12-13. Verse 13 clearly states that the "prophets and the law prophesied until John"; and verse 12 says, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been coming violently, and men of violence take it by force." Such is the rendering in the margin of the Revised Standard Version, and it is the preferable rendition. The Kingdom of God, as we have seen, is God's reign redemptively at work among men; and this is the meaning of Matt. 11: 12. However, that generation of Israel would not respond to the work of God's Kingdom, either when John the Baptist preached repentance in anticipation of the Kingdom or when our Lord offered the blessings of the Kingdom. They were like obstinate children who were playing a game of imitation; they refused to play either wedding or funeral (vv. 16-17). They refused the sombre challenge of John to repent, and they declined the joyful offer of Jesus of the power and the life of God's Kingdom.

Therefore, only judgment is in store for that generation (v. 20). A terrible woe is pronounced over the cities of Israel like Chorazin and Bethsaida because mighty works had been performed in their streets—the mighty works of the Kingdom of God itself. Jesus had appeared in their cities, casting out demons, delivering men from satanic power and preaching that the Kingdom of God had come upon them to defeat Satan and to deliver men from his rule. Yet in spite of these mighty works, Israel did not respond. Therefore, "it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you" (v. 24).

The invitation to receive the blessings of the Kingdom is offered to those who will accept it on an individual basis. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (vv. 28-29).

In the Old Testament dispensation, God had dealt with Israel primarily as a family and a nation and had given to His people both earthly and religious blessings. When God made a covenant with Abraham, Abraham took all the male members of his household and circumcised them, thus bringing them within the terms and blessings of the covenant (Gen. 17: 22-27). Although

we find in the prophets a growing emphasis upon the individual, the terms of the Old Covenant were primarily with Israel as a nation; and Gentiles could share the spiritual blessings of the Covenant only by becoming part of the nation.

Our Lord's offer of the Kingdom of God was not the offer of a political kingdom, nor did it involve national and material blessings. The Jews wanted a political king to overthrow their enemies; but Jesus refused an earthly crown (John 6: 15), offering spiritual bread instead of an earthly kingdom (John 6: 52-57). Jesus addressed Himself to the individual; and the terms of the new relationship were exclusively those of personal decision and faith. This fact is eloquently set forth in the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist who told the Jews that descent from Abraham was not adequate to qualify them for the blessings of the coming Kingdom (Matt. 3: 7-10). The spiritual blessings of the new era were to be bestowed on an individual rather than on a family basis. Even those who considered themselves children of the Old Covenant must experience personal repentance and submit to baptism in anticipation of Him who was to come.

Our Lord also made the personal terms of the new relationship clear when he said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: and a man's foes will be those of his own household" (Matt. 10: 35-36). The family unit is no longer to be the basis of the relationship between God and man; personal faith which would often cut across family lines and even rupture ties of flesh and blood is the fundamental basis of man's relationship to the Kingdom of God.

The Jews as a whole refused this new relationship. There were some, however, who responded and who became disciples of our Lord and thus true sons of the Kingdom of God. These formed the nucleus of what became the Church.

The sixteenth chapter of Matthew relates our Lord's purpose in the formation of the new people of God, the Church. It is significant that Jesus could say nothing about His redemptive purpose to bring into existence this new people of God until the disciples had realized that He was indeed the Messiah. Confession

of His Messiahship is at the same time confession of the presence of the Kingdom of God, for it is the mission of the Messiah to bring the Kingdom of God to men. At this point, we must understand that there was for the disciples a problem in the recognition of our Lord's Messiahship even as there was a problem in their recognition of the presence of the Kingdom of God.

We have discovered that the popular expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God meant that the end of the Age and the manifestation of God's rule in power and glory, when all evil would be purged from the earth. However, Jesus taught that the Kingdom had come but in a new and unexpected form. Although the old Age goes on, the Kingdom of God has invaded the realm of Satan to deliver men from his rule. This was the mystery, the new disclosure of the divine purpose in the mission of our Lord.

This same problem was involved in the disclosure of our Lord's Messiahship. To the Jews, including the disciples of Jesus, Messiah was expected to be either a conquering Davidic King before whom the enemies of God and of God's people could not stand; or He would be a heavenly supernatural being who would come to earth with power and great glory to destroy the wicked and to bring the Kingdom of God in power (see Daniel 7). In either case, the coming of Messiah would mean the end of This Age and the appearance of the Kingdom in power.

Then Jesus appeared neither as a conquering Davidic King nor as a heavenly glorious Son of Man, but as a man among men in humility and weakness. The people could not understand how He could be their Messiah even though He performed wonderful works. At one point, they thought He might indeed be Messiah, and they tried to force His hand. After the feeding of the five thousand, when he had taken a few fish and loaves and multiplied them so as to feed a host of people, they came to take Him by force and make Him King (John 6: 15).

Such, however, was not our Lord's mission. His mission, as well as His Messiahship, was a "mystery"; it was not to bring the evil Age to its end and inaugurate The Age to Come. It was rather to bring the powers of the future Age to men in the midst

of the present evil Age; and this mission involved His death. Therefore when the crowds tried to make Him king, He withdrew. This was a turning point in His ministry; and after this, "many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him" (John 6: 66). He was not the Messiah for whom they were looking. He said that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6: 53). What did this mean? They could not understand His words about His flesh which He would give for the life of the world (John 6: 51). The fact is, the Jews of our Lord's day did not understand the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. They did not know that it had reference to Messiah. They were looking only for a conquering King or a heavenly Son of Man, not a Suffering Servant. Therefore they turned back and refused to follow Him. Even as they rejected His offer of the Kingdom because it was not what they were looking for, so they rejected His Messiahship because He was not the conquering, ruling monarch they desired.

Finally, however, the inner circle of the disciples began to realize that in spite of the fact that the Kingdom was not present in mighty power, in spite of the fact that Jesus was not to be a Davidic King, He was nevertheless the Messiah and the Kingdom was indeed present in His person and mission. This is the significance of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus perceived that they had come to a crucial point of basic understanding, and He asked the disciples who He was. Peter finally spoke for the others: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). We do not often realize how great an achievement this represented or how difficult it was for Peter and the others to recognize Jesus' Messiahship because it was so utterly different from anything they had expected. It was indeed a realization which could come to men only through divine revelation itself (v. 17).

Once they had realized that He was the Messiah, even though in a new and unexpected role, Jesus instructed them as to His further purpose. His purpose was not that of a national restoration of Israel. On the contrary, He would create a new people. "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you

bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16: 18-19).

The meaning of the "rock" on which Jesus was to build His Church has been vigorously debated, although for our present purpose the answer to this question is not essential. Whether the rock is Peter's faith in the Messiahship and deity of Christ (Calvin), whether it is the person of Christ itself (Luther), or whether there is in reality an *unofficial* sense in which Peter, as the spokesman for the other disciples and the leader of the apostles and of the early Church in its first years, may be said to be the foundation on which the initial levels of the Church were erected, the result is ultimately the same. There is no evidence in the New Testament that an official authority was given to Peter which he could pass on to others. However, the Church is in fact "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner-stone" (Eph. 2: 20); and it is possible that our Lord addressed Peter as the representative of the apostles on whom the Church was to be erected.

In any case, our Lord indicates His purpose to build His Church. The particular form of this phrase is important. The Greek word, *ekklesia*, is the word most commonly used in the Greek Old Testament to refer to Israel as the people of God. The very use of this word suggests that our Lord purposed to bring into existence a new people who would take the place of the old Israel who rejected both His claim to Messiahship and His offer of the Kingdom of God. The fulfilment of this promise began at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out baptizing those who were followers of Jesus into the body of Christ and thus historically giving birth to the Church (I Cor. 12: 13).

Our present concern is to ask about the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the Church. Jesus promised to give to Peter, as the representative of the apostles and the Church, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. We have discovered earlier that the Kingdom of God means first of all the redemptive activity and rule of God working among men; and it is secondly the realm in which men experience the blessings of His rule. In this verse, the Kingdom of Heaven is seen as the final realm in which the blessings of God's rule are enjoyed, the realm of The Age to

Come, when every authority and power will be abolished. It is, in fact, that which is popularly thought of as "heaven". The keys of the future Kingdom of Heaven, *i.e.*, the power to open or close the doors into the blessings of The Age to Come are to be entrusted to the apostles of the Church which our Lord is to bring into being. No longer is the Kingdom of God active in the world through Israel; it works rather through the Church.

This understanding is borne out by a saying of our Lord in Luke 11: 52. Jesus condemned the Scribes because they had "taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering." The key of knowledge which should open the door of the Kingdom of God had been entrusted to the leaders of the Jewish people. This key was the correct understanding and interpretation of the Old Testament which should have led the Jews to recognize in our Lord's person and ministry the presence of the Kingdom of God and the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises. Paul expressed the same truth when he said that God had entrusted to Israel the oracles of God (Rom. 3: 2). However, the scribes had taken away the key of knowledge; they so interpreted the Scriptures that they pointed away from Christ rather than to Him as the One who had come to fulfil the prophets. Thus they refused to enter into the realm of Kingdom blessings which Jesus brought, and they hindered those who wanted to enter.

After J. H. the Baptist?
No - see below
Matt 11: 33-42

On another occasion, Jesus said to these religious leaders, "The tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21: 31). Of course He did not mean to say that they were really entering the blessings of the Kingdom; they were in fact standing aside and watching the publicans and harlots enter and were even trying to prevent them from entering.

(in front of) (ph... new?)

This key of knowledge which in the Old Testament dispensation had been entrusted to Israel is now entrusted by our Lord to the apostles and to the Church. This fact is clearly taught in the parable of the wicked tenants in Matthew 21: 33-42. God had entrusted His vineyard to Israel. He sent to them from time to time His servants, the prophets, for an accounting, but "the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another." Finally, He sent His Son thinking that they would reverence and acknowledge Him. But "they took him and cast

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him out of the vineyard, and killed him." Jesus Himself interprets this parable in no uncertain terms: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (v. 43).

Here is an unambiguous statement. Israel had been the possessors of the Kingdom of God. This means that until the time of the coming of Christ in the flesh, God's redemptive activity in history had been channelled through the nation Israel and the blessings of the divine rule had been bestowed upon this people. The children of Israel were indeed the sons of the Kingdom. Gentiles could share these blessings only by entering into relationship with Israel. However, when the time came that God manifested His redemptive activity in a new and wonderful way and the Kingdom of God visited men in the person of God's Son bringing to them a fuller measure of the blessings of the divine rule, Israel rejected both the Kingdom and the Bearer of the Kingdom. Therefore, the Kingdom in its new manifestation was taken away from Israel and given to a new people.

This new people is the Church. "On this rock I will build my church." In this saying, the word "church" does not yet have the technical meaning which it acquires after Pentecost. As we have already indicated, the word means the people of God. This new people is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" spoken of by Peter (I Pet. 2: 9). The Kingdom of God does not now belong to the race of Abraham but to "an elect race," for "it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3: 7). It is not the possession of an Israelitic priesthood, for Christ has made those who constitute His Church to be "priests to his God and Father" (Rev. 1: 6). God is not now dealing with a nation after the flesh, but with a holy nation, the Church, on the basis of personal saving faith in Jesus the Son of God.

The relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God must be clearly established. The Kingdom of God is first of all the divine redemptive rule manifested in Christ, and it is secondly the realm of sphere in which the blessings of the divine rule may be experienced. These distinctions have been carefully developed in an earlier chapter. As the divine redemptive rule of God, the Kingdom of God has come among men to defeat Satan and to

deliver men from the domination of satanic power (Matt. 12: 28). Because it is a present realm in which these blessings are enjoyed, men may now enter into the Kingdom of God. The era of the law and the prophets ended with John the Baptist; from that time the Kingdom of God was preached and all who received the announcement entered vigorously, indeed "violently," into the Kingdom (Luke 16: 16). All who have received this good news of redemption have been "delivered . . . from the dominion of darkness (see II Cor. 4: 4) and transferred . . . to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1: 13).

The Kingdom of God is at the same time the Kingdom of Christ (Eph. 5: 5); for the Kingdom of God, the redemptive reign of God, is manifested among men through the person of Christ, and it is Christ who must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet (I Cor. 15: 25). Indeed, if any distinction is to be made between the Kingdom of God and of Christ, we must say that the Kingdom of Christ includes the period from His coming in the flesh until the end of His millennial reign "when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father" (I Cor. 15: 24).¹

The Kingdom of God, as the redemptive activity and rule of God in Christ, created the Church and works through the Church in the world. As the disciples of the Lord went throughout the villages of Palestine, they proclaimed that in their mission, the Kingdom of God had come near to these villages (Luke 10: 9). They performed the signs of the Kingdom, healing the sick and casting out demons, thus delivering men from the satanic power (vv. 9, 17). Any city which rejected them thereby rejected the Kingdom of God and reserved for itself a fearful judgment, for in the mission of the disciples, "the kingdom of God has come near" (v. 11). Thus the Kingdom of God was at work among men not only in the person of our Lord but also through His disciples as they brought the word and the signs of the Kingdom to the cities of Galilee.

In the same way, the Kingdom of God, the redemptive activity and power of God, is working in the world today through the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is the fellowship of disciples of Jesus who have received the life of the Kingdom and are

¹ Professor Oscar Cullmann suggests that such a distinction should be made. See above, p. 28.

dedicated to the task of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom in the world. Philip went to Samaria preaching "good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8: 12). Paul went to Rome and preached first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles, the Kingdom of God (Acts 28: 23, 31).

As the emissaries of our Lord went throughout the Roman world with the proclamation of the Kingdom and as today the disciples of Jesus go throughout the world with the good news about the Kingdom of God, two things always happen: some men are loosed while others are bound. Some believe and receive the message. They are delivered out of the power of darkness and transferred into the Kingdom of the Son of God's love (Col. 1: 13); that is, they enter into the Kingdom of God because they receive its blessings. Furthermore, they are assured of an entrance into the future Kingdom of God when Christ comes in glory.

Others, however, reject the good news of the Kingdom. To them, the doors of the Kingdom of God, both in the present and in the future, are closed. Christ has indeed given to His disciples, to the Church, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and what His disciples bind on earth as they preach the Gospel of the Kingdom will be bound in heaven; and what they loose on earth, *i.e.*, those whom they loose from their sins, will be loosed in heaven. In a real sense of the word, it is the Church—the disciples of the Lord—who use the keys and perform the function of binding and loosing; but in a deeper sense, it is the working of the Kingdom of God through the Church which accomplishes these eternal ends. The important fact is this: The Kingdom of God does not function in a vacuum but is entrusted to men and works through redeemed men who have given themselves to the rule of God through Christ. It is, however, a dynamic and not an official function which the Church exercises.

There are a very few verses in the New Testament which equate the Kingdom with the Church, but these very verses support our conclusions. Revelation 5: 9-10 reads, "Thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth."¹ This song

¹ The present tense of the King James Version represents an inferior Greek text.

of the twenty-four elders identifies all of the redeemed as a Kingdom. Do we not therefore have the Scriptural precedent to identify the Church with the Kingdom of God? Only in this sense: the redeemed are a kingdom *because they shall reign upon the earth*. They are not a kingdom because the members of the Church are the people over whom Christ exercises His reign. They are not a kingdom because the Church is the sphere or realm in which the blessings of the redemptive reign are to be experienced. The Church is a kingdom because it shares Christ's rule. The Kingdom of God in this verse is not the realm of God's reign; it is God's reign itself, a reign which is shared with those who surrender themselves to it.

Revelation 1: 6 is to be interpreted in light of this verse. The Church is both a priesthood and a kingdom. The redeemed share the prerogative of their Great High Priest of entering into the very Holy of Holies and worshipping God. They are priests. The Church also shares the prerogative of their Lord and King. They are granted the right to rule with Christ. They are a kingdom, a nation of kings.

The Church therefore is not the Kingdom of God; God's Kingdom creates the Church and works in the world through the Church. Men cannot therefore build the Kingdom of God, but they can preach it and proclaim it; they can receive it or reject it. The Kingdom of God which in the Old Testament dispensation was manifested in Israel is now working in the world through the Church.

There is therefore but one people of God. This is not to say that the Old Testament saints belonged to the Church and that we must speak of the Church in the Old Testament. Acts 7: 28 does indeed speak of the "church in the wilderness"; but the word here does not bear its New Testament connotation but designates only the "congregation" in the wilderness. The Church properly speaking had its birthday on the day of Pentecost, for the Church is composed of all of those who by one Spirit have been baptized into one body (I Cor. 12: 13), and this baptizing work of the Spirit began on the day of Pentecost.

While we must therefore speak of Israel and the Church, we must speak of only one people of God. This is vividly clear in

Paul's illustration of the olive tree in Romans 11. There is one olive tree; it is the people of God. In the Old Testament era, the branches of the tree were Israel. However, because of unbelief, some of the natural branches were broken off and no longer belong to the tree (v. 16). We know from verse 5 that not all of the branches were broken off, for "there is a remnant, chosen by grace." Some Jews accepted the Messiah and His message of the Gospel of the Kingdom. We must remember that the earliest Church consisted of Jewish believers; but they came into the Church not because they were Jews but because they were believers.

When these natural branches were broken off, other branches were taken from a wild olive and contrary to nature grafted into the olive tree (vv. 17, 24). This refers to the Gentiles who received the Gospel of the Kingdom, the "other nation" (Matt. 21: 43) of which our Lord spoke. The natural branches which were broken off were cast from the tree because of unbelief; and the wild branches were grafted on because of their faith (v. 20). This entire procedure is "contrary to nature"; *i.e.*, it is not what one would expect from reading the Old Testament. From the Old Testament point of view, one would never know that the people of God was to consist largely of Gentiles and that the majority of the Jewish nation were to be broken off. This mixed character of the Church is indeed another mystery—a further disclosure of God's redemptive purpose which had not been revealed to the Old Testament prophets (Eph. 3: 3).

In the Old Testament era, the olive tree—the people of God—consisted of the children of Israel. Gentiles entered into the blessings of God's people only as they shared the terms of the covenant with Israel. In the New Testament dispensation, the natural branches, Israel, have been largely broken off the tree because of unbelief and wild branches from the Gentiles have been grafted in, through faith. But there is but one tree, one people of God, which consisted first of Israelites and then of believing Gentiles and Jews. It is impossible to think of two peoples of God through whom God is carrying out two different redemptive purposes without doing violence to Romans 11.

This present state of the olive tree, however, is not God's last work. Paul writes, "And even the others, if they do not persist

in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. . . . Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11: 23, 25 f.). The final form of the olive tree will not be one whose branches are largely wild, *i.e.*, Gentiles. Israel—the natural branches which were broken off because of unbelief—is yet to believe and be grafted again into the olive tree. Here is another "mystery," another redemptive purpose of God which was not disclosed to the prophets but which has now been revealed through the apostles. The hardening of Israel and their rejection from the people of God is only partial and temporary; it will last until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. God has a purpose to bring salvation to the Gentile peoples and He has used the unbelief of Israel to bring about the accomplishment of this redemptive purpose. But when His purpose with the wild branches has been completed, He will turn again to the natural branches; the veil will be taken away from their eyes (II Cor. 3: 16) and they will believe and be grafted again into the people of God. Thus "all Israel will be saved."

It is quite impossible in light of the context and the course of Paul's thought in this passage to understand "all Israel" to refer to the Church. There is, to be sure, a very real sense in which the Church is Israel, the sons of Abraham, the true circumcision (Gal. 3: 7; Rom. 2: 28; 4: 1, 12, 16). However, this does not mean that God has for ever cast off Israel after the flesh. Paul emphatically denies this. There is first of all a spiritual remnant—natural branches which were not broken off because they received Christ (Rom. 11: 1-6). But secondly, there is to be a greater turning to the Lord on the part of Israel after the flesh, of such proportions that Paul can say that "all Israel," *i.e.*, Israel as a whole, will be saved.

This future salvation of Israel is reflected in a few sayings of our Lord. As he was weeping over Jerusalem not long before His death, He cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken

and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matt. 23: 37-39). Jerusalem, symbolic of Israel, had rejected the prophets whom God had sent, until finally, God sent His Son. Jesus longed to gather Israel into the blessings of God's Kingdom but Israel would not hear; the Son was rejected. Therefore judgment rests upon Israel and the Holy City is to be destroyed. The judgments of God's Kingdom have often been manifested in history. However, this desolation of Jerusalem which was historically accomplished in A.D. 70 when the temple was destroyed and the city ravaged by the Romans is not to be the final word. It will be the last visitation of God to Israel until that day comes when Israel will recognize Christ as her Messiah and will say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Israel is yet to be saved.

Again, in Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse which forecast both the historical destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age, we read that Jesus said of the Holy City, "Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21: 24). The divine judgment is to rest upon Jerusalem and upon the Jewish nation until the "times of the Gentiles," *i.e.*, the divine visitation of the Gentiles is accomplished. When God's purpose for the Gentiles is fulfilled, so this verse implies, Jerusalem will no longer be trodden down. There will be a restoration of Israel; "all Israel will be saved."

It is impossible in this study to enter into the question of how this restoration and the regrafting of Israel into the people of God is to be accomplished. The New Testament has very little to say about the way in which God will effect this end. One fact, however, is very important: so far as the New Testament is concerned, the salvation of Israel is an essential part of God's single redemptive purpose. The work of God's Spirit in the formation of the Church and the future divine visitation of Israel by which the natural branches are regrafted into the olive tree ought not to be seen as two separate and unrelated purposes but as two stages of the single redemptive purpose of God through His Kingdom. There is a single olive tree, and there is one Kingdom of God. The final stages of the reign of God in Christ by which He will

put all His enemies under His feet (I Cor. 15: 25) will include the salvation of Israel after the flesh. The people of God through whom the Kingdom of God is working in This Age is the Church which consists largely of Gentiles; but the people of God in whom the Kingdom will come to its consummation will include Israel (Rom. 11: 12). But there is one Kingdom and there is one people.

Too often in our study of the relationship between the Kingdom of God, The Church and Israel, we lose sight of the fact which is for us of primary importance: the Kingdom of God which will finally bring salvation to Israel and which will bring Israel into the Kingdom has brought salvation to us who constitute the Church and has brought us into God's Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is working in the world through the disciples of Jesus Christ who have surrendered to the demand of the Kingdom and constitute the new people of God, the Church. The Kingdom of God has invaded the realm of Satan in the person and mission of Christ to deliver men from the bondage of darkness; and the conflict between the Kingdom of God and the powers of darkness continues as the Church bears the good news of God's Kingdom to the nations of the earth.

While the Kingdom of God will not be realized as a state of perfect blessedness until Christ returns, God's Kingdom is at work in the world and is engaged in a mortal struggle with evil. The Church is the instrument of this struggle. Conflict therefore must ever be an essential element in the life of the Church so long as This Age lasts. Human history will realize something of the life and blessings of God's Kingdom because a new community has been formed in human society. The Church is the community of the Kingdom of God and is to press the struggle against satanic evil in the world. The sons of the Kingdom cannot help but exercise an influence in human history for they are the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5: 13-16). So long as light is light, it must shine; and so long as salt is salt, it must preserve. Thus the mission of the Church is not only that of employing the keys of the Kingdom to open to both Jew and Gentile the door into the eternal life which is the gift of God's Kingdom; it is also the instrument of God's dynamic rule in the world to oppose evil and the powers of Satan in every form of their manifestation.

When God's people lose sight of this fact, we betray our character as the Church. We are the focus of a conflict between the Kingdom of God and satanic evil. This is essentially a conflict in the spiritual realm. But these spiritual forces of satanic evil and of God's Kingdom manifest themselves in the areas of human conduct and relationships. Therefore we must press the battle against the powers of darkness wherever we find them until the day dawns and the light of the knowledge of God shall fill the earth.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

SCRIPTURAL STUDIES IN
THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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