

#8 - Revealing the Kingdom of God
“A Permanent Role for the Land of Israel?
And Premillennialists’ Response to the ‘Kingdom’ Passages”
“Premillennialism” as Presented by Norman Geisler

IMPORTANT REVIEW:

The first thing I wish to do (and I’ll do it for a few weeks now) is to reemphasize the fact that the church is the kingdom on earth and that the kingdom / church was established - brought into being - on the day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2.

Here are the passages: Matthew 16:28 (particularly its parallel in Mark 9:1); Luke 24:49; Acts 1:6-8 - all fulfilled in Acts 2:1-4 wherein Acts 2:33 shows that Jesus sat on His throne, as *King* when He ascended into heaven. Based on Zechariah 6:12-13 and Psalm 110:1, 4, when Jesus *assumed His role as priest*, He became king, i. e., at His ascension.

There are various other passages which will substantiate the point that the kingdom / church is in existence already in NT times: Matthew 16:18-19; Amos 9:11-12 (fulfilled in the church; see Acts 15:16-18); Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Rev. 1:6, 9; 5:10.

PREMILLENNIALISM AS PRESENTED BY NORMAN GEISLER:

Remember, we are defining “premillennialism” from Geisler’s words: “Christ will physically return to earth and set up a worldwide thousand-year reign” (pg. 1413).

Fundamental mistake #1 premillennialists make is to take all prophecy *literally*.

Fundamental mistake #2 they make is to argue that “Israel will have a unique role in the messianic kingdom, *functionally* superior to that of the Gentiles” (pg 1333; emph. Geisler’s).

Notice these texts which argue that Israel is no longer (as a nation) a part of God’s plans...

Matthew 8:11-12; 21:38-44; Acts 13:44-52; Romans 2:28-29; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 2 Corinthians 3:7-11; Galatians 3:23-29; 6:11-16; Ephesians 2:11-18; Doesn’t it stand to reason that the *nation of flesh* which was created by the “law of commandments” also came to an end at the cross? Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:9-15; Hebrews 8:7-13; 1 Peter 2:9.

On 1 Peter 2:9, Geisler (pg. 1340):

1. Peter does not offer this as a spiritual fulfillment of what God promised Israel.
2. This does not even appear to be a citation of the prophecy that Israel was to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exo. 19:6).
3. Peter borrows some of the Old Testament’s language and appropriately applies it to New Testament believers.
4. That two entities have a common description of some characteristics does not mean they are identical. “At most, Peter is borrowing language used of God’s people in the Old Testament and applying it to God’s people in the New Testament” (pg. 1341).

Is there any doubt that there is no role for Israel in the permanent plans of God? Is there any doubt that the law of Moses has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and that the law serves no purpose in God’s permanent plans anymore?

On a later page, in a footnote (#70), Geisler uses these verses to show that the “spiritual seed” [the church] is a parallel, not a replacement for national Israel. “There is a future for Abraham’s physical descendants; indeed, as will be shown, all outstanding land-and kingdom-

promises to Israel will be fulfilled at the second coming” (pg. 1339). His additional passages are: Matthew 19:28 [are these literally thrones or metaphorical thrones?]; Luke 21:24 [this refers to A. D. 70, see verse 20 and Matt. 24:15]; Acts 1:6-7; Rom. 11.

A part of this view that Israel has a permanent part in God’s eternal plan is that the land of Palestine is *still* a part of God’s land. This view, through Protestants, has a heavy influence on our foreign policy, particularly as it relates to Israel...

Relative to the promise of “land,” Geisler writes that God’s promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:9-22; 17:7, 19) that the land would be theirs is “forever” and “This has never been fulfilled in either the duration sense of *forever* or in the extended sense of the land dimensions” (pg 1344). Although he cites Joshua 21:43-45, he brushes off the comprehensive nature of the statement by saying, “Israel did not have the land all the way to the Euphrates.” But that contradicts what God had Joshua write! *There is no reference in the NT to Israel needing to have their land for any purpose!* Notice that Geisler thinks the promise of land from Genesis 15 still has to be fulfilled because Israel had not (by Joshua’s day) reached the Euphrates River. However, by the days of David (1 Chron. 18:3) and Solomon (2 Chron. 9:26), Israel had reached the Euphrates.

Then, several pages later, on page 1358, Geisler makes a startling admission that at least cuts the foundation out from under his contention that Israel still deserves the “Promised Land.” Notice what he says: “the Hebrew word (*olam*) often translated *forever* can (and sometimes does) mean ‘a long period of time’ rather than ‘eternal’.” *So how does he know this promise of land is “eternal” and not “a long period of time”?! Again, the NT does not picture Israel needing land for any future purpose.*

HOW DOES PREMILLENNIALISM DEAL WITH THE “KINGDOM” PASSAGES?

This question takes up a whole chapter in Geisler’s book... Now, there are *some* passages which use “kingdom” to refer to the *consummation* of God’s plans: the kingdom in heaven: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:5; 2 Timothy 4:18; 2 Peter 1:11. But, fundamentally the “kingdom on earth” (the church) and the “kingdom in heaven / eternal kingdom” are the same. Now, the kingdom in heaven, as we have noted, will include the faithful Jews under the Law of Moses *along with* the faithful Christians under the law of Christ. But, that’s the kingdom in heaven.

Fundamental mistake #3 which premillennialists make is to create more distinctions in the word “kingdom” than what the Bible allows. They have to do this in order to “explain away” the evidence we have already presented. Geisler writes (1347): “*Kingdom’s* theological meaning includes several dimensions, including God’s overall reign in the universe, His present spiritual reigning His people, and His future messianic reign on earth.”

Geisler states that we have to distinguish the different forms in order to have a proper understanding of this topic (1348).

These designations are from Geisler:

1. God’s universal kingdom - This refers to God’s everlasting reign over the entire universe: Psalm 145:13. *This refers to the kingdom of David / Israel.*

2. God’s Messianic Kingdom - Here, Geisler states: “The messianic kingdom is a visible, earthly, political kingdom promised to Israel in which Christ, her Messiah, will reign from a throne in Jerusalem over the whole earth, with His apostles and other disciples serving Him. This rule will bring both peace and justice for all people and will last ‘a thousand years’” (1348). Relative to the “thousand years, his footnote cites Revelation 20:1-6. What are some problems you see with this statement?

3. God's Spiritual Kingdom (in a broad sense). Here, Geisler claims that God "established a spiritual reign that represents professing Christendom" (1349). This is the concept we have been studying, known as the "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God." He acknowledges that this "kingdom" exists on earth, because it contains "earthly evil therein, *before* the harvest" (emph. his). See also Matt. 13:41. He acknowledges that "kingdom of heaven" ties this "kingdom" to Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 2:44.

4. God's spiritual kingdom (in the narrow sense). This is the "invisible reign of God [which] is in the hearts of believers... one can enter only by believing and being born again" (1350). Here, he cites John 3:3-7. He continues: "If no one can enter 'the kingdom of God' unless he is born again, then this kingdom must be distinguished from the above use of the same phrase, which includes both the saved and the unsaved. Those who profess faith, and yet do not possess true faith are still part of God's broader kingdom (cf. Matt. 7:21-22)."

Here, his Calvinism enters the picture. Those who possess "true faith" are the elect, those whom God chose before the foundation of the world to be saved. They are in God's kingdom and they will be in the *heavenly* kingdom. Those who do not have "true faith" (that is, the "professors" of faith, not the "possessors" of faith) are in the kingdom *on earth*, but they will be excluded as he notes in point #3 above.

"Since the narrow sense of God's spiritual kingdom is ultimately the equivalent of heaven, which is treated elsewhere, we will not discuss it further except to contrast it with the broad sense of God's kingdom."

5. God's spiritual reign in the Church. Here, Geisler believes "kingdom of God is also used of the New Testament Church" to an extent. The kingdom of God is "broader than the church."

6. God's overarching, constant, invisible, universal reign. Here He notes 1 Chronicles 29:11. He writes "In one sense, *everything* is in God's kingdom..." (1351). First, doesn't this "kingdom" or "dominion" refer to the nation of Israel or perhaps at least to the idea that God reigns over everything? Secondly, doesn't Satan rule over this world? (2 Cor. 4:4).

The next major section of Geisler's study is "The Messianic Kingdom"

Again, this is "the visible, earthly, political reign of the promised Jewish Messiah" (1351).

Geisler, citing another author, Alva McClain from *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, writes that the messianic kingdom has six aspects:

- 1) spiritual dimension
- 2) political dimension
- 3) ecclesiastical dimension
- 4) economic (social) dimension
- 5) physical dimension
- 6) moral dimension

What problem(s) do you see with this?

The verses Geisler uses are as follows: Genesis 49:10; Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 2 Samuel 7:11-12, 16-17 (doesn't Gabriel state that Jesus will rule over the house of David, sitting on his throne - Luke 1:32-33?) On this passage, Geisler notes that it was fulfilled at Mark 11:10; Matt. 21:9 and notes: "They [the Jews] were expecting the start of the promised messianic kingdom" (1353)."

Other passages Geisler uses: Isaiah 9:6 (Here, he argues that “Christ’s deity *and* political reign are mentioned” (emph. his); Isaiah 11:11-12 (“this literal political restoration of the David kingdom”) He goes on commenting on this text (1354): “Not only is this a literal prediction of a literal return to a literal land, it has been literally fulfilled in part since May 115, 1948, when Israel was declared a nation... If this has been literally fulfilled, why should there be any doubt about the restoration of the messianic political kingdom as well?” Isaiah 24:23 - “the center of Messiah’s reign is specified” and “Zechariah speaks of Messiah’s return to the place He left:” Zech. 14:4 (Incidentally, the Mount of Olives is referred to in the NT 12 times, all referring to the last week of Jesus on earth. *None of them refer to Jesus coming literally, physically, to the Mount of Olives!!!*) In this context, Geisler refers to Acts 1:11, stating: “Since they saw Him go visibly, physically, and gloriously, He will return visibly, physically, and gloriously...” This statement (and passage), of course, have nothing to do with premillennialism.

He refers to Isaiah 32:1, linking it with Zech. 9:9 (which, of course, is *already fulfilled!* Matt. 21:5); Jer. 31:31-33 - on this passage, Geisler comments: “it gives no implication of annulling the unconditional, timeless Abrahamic and David covenants” (1355). Ok, compare this passage with Hebrew’s reference and use in Hebrews 8:7-13. Geisler comments: “there will be a moral and spiritual restoration of national Israel, called ‘the house of Israel’ (v. 31). “... the new covenant is an implied promise of the restoration of the whole messianic kingdom.” What does Jeremiah 31:31-33 *necessarily imply*? Third, Geisler states the promise is “unconditional and irrevocable.” With that, I doubt we would have a disagreement.

He refers to Ezekiel 11:23 (the “earthly kingdom... was destroyed by the Babylonians”); Hosea 3:4; Amos 9:11 - “There is no sense in which a merely spiritual restoration can meaningfully fulfill this prediction” - but Peter says it was fulfilled in Acts 15:13-18! Micah 4:7-8 - “The restored kingdom will not be only spiritual and moral but also political.” Didn’t Jesus set up His kingdom? Micah 4:1-4 was fulfilled in Acts 2 and Micah 5:1-2 was fulfilled in Matthew 2:5.

Daniel 2:44 - “it is difficult to believe there is not within these words an affirmation of an outward, literal, political kingdom.” He links the passage to Matthew 19:28. In what way *do the apostles reign / rule from thrones over God’s kingdom*? Through their word: Luke 10:16; Eph. 2:19-22. Commenting on Matthew 19:28, Geisler writes (1356): “the literal sense of a visible, outward political kingdom seems clearly to be in view; this is the common (if not universal) biblical use of terms like *tribes* and *Israel*.” We have already shown that “regeneration” is only found one other time in the NT, in Titus 3:5, which is linked with baptism into the church at Eph. 5:26.

Daniel 4 - “in the context of an earthly political kingdom.”

Daniel 7 - “*all* the references to the word *kingdom* refer to a literal, earthly, political reign (emph. his).” We have already given ample time to the point that Daniel 7:13-14 is *fulfilled* in the kingdom Jesus established in the NT; Matthew sets his gospel in the context of the fulfillment of Daniel 7.

Matthew 26:63-64 - “there seems to be no way to consistently utilize historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture without concluding that this will be a literal messianic kingdom.” *In what way could the high priest see Jesus reigning at the right hand of God?*

Daniel 9:24-27 -

Next time, we'll examine "salient points from the above texts..." In that study, we'll examine the premillennialists' contention that "The Messianic Kingdom was not established during Jesus' day."