

A Brief Response to “Matthew Among the Dispensationalists”

By David Turner

1. I believe the preaching of John and Jesus, inviting people to repent because the Kingdom of the Heavens had drawn near (in time and space) (Matt. 3:2; 4:17) was
 - a. A call to repent in order to prepare for
 - b. The political kingdom long promised to Israel. People had to prepare spiritually in order to enter the political Kingdom.
 - c. This was not a call to enter the church. Jesus did not predict His building of the church until Matthew 16.
2. The Pharisees, spiritual leaders of the nation irrevocably rejected Jesus when they accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan (Matt. 9:32-34).
 - a. So by this time, the spiritual leaders, representing the nation, had already rejected Jesus.
 - b. Nevertheless, Jesus continued to travel through the cities and villages proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom (Matt. 9:35).
3. Jesus commissioned the 12 to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, reaffirming, “The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near” (Matt. 10:7).
 - a. For the city who rejected them, it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than it would be for that city (Matt. 10:15).
 - b. This commissioning had eschatological overtones (Matt. 10:23).
4. Jesus denounced the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum. Though He had performed miracles in them, they had not repented. It would be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon and Sodom than for these Jewish cities (Matt. 11:20-24).
 - a. Clearly, the nation of Israel as a whole, represented by these sample cities, had rejected Jesus.

5. When Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath Day, the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him how they might destroy Him. The Pharisees' rejection of Jesus had elevated itself to conspiracy to murder their Messiah (Matt. 11:9-14).
6. Next, Jesus healed a blind and mute man who was demon-possessed. The crowds were amazed and assigned Messianic status to Jesus (Matt. 12:22-23).
 - a. But the Pharisees accused Him of casting out demons by the power of the Devil (Matt. 12:24).
 - b. Jesus accused them of having committed the Unpardonable Sin. The Pharisees were the spiritual leaders of Israel. They had crossed the point of no return. They represented Israel's National and Unforgivable Rejection of their Messiah (Matt. 12:25-32)!
7. From that point on, Jesus never again preached the Good News that the Kingdom of the Heavens had drawn near (in time and space) to the nation of Israel. The Nation's fate was sealed!
8. Instead, Jesus proclaimed in parables what would take place in the interim between the First Advent and the Second Advent of the King. These were the Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13).
9. I disagree with Turner that Israel did not, as a nation, reject Jesus. They certainly did. When they had Jesus crucified, they said the horrible words, "Let his blood be upon us and upon our children" (Matt. 27:25). Their wish has been fulfilled in a ghastly way ever since.
10. In Matthew 16:13-20, when Peter correctly answered that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus did not predict that He would build His kingdom upon Peter's confession. Rather He said that He would build His Church upon Peter's confession. So I agree with Turner that "The church is not the kingdom" (Conclusion, point 4).
11. However, I believe, unlike Turner, that there is presently a discontinuity between the Kingdom and the Church. That discontinuity will be remedied in the long-term future when the Purified Church becomes the Purified Bride of Christ and participates in His Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 19:7-9).

12. Here are some reasons why I believe there is presently a discontinuity between the Kingdom and the Church.
 - a. In Jesus’ model prayer he urged us to pray to the Father, “Come, Your kingdom! Be done Your will – as in heaven so on earth” (Matt. 6:10). If God’s will is not presently being performed on earth just as it is performed in heaven, how can we say that His kingdom has come?
 - b. How can we say Jesus’ kingdom has been inaugurated when the nation of Israel, for centuries, has been utterly opposed to Jesus as their Messiah?
 - c. Jesus’ parable of the ten minas was given to the disciples to dissuade them from the notion that the Kingdom was going to appear any time soon (Luke 19:11, see Luke 19:11-27). Why should we say the kingdom appeared shortly thereafter (Day of Pentecost?), when Jesus said it would not do so?
 - d. Jesus taught about the Kingdom for 40 days (Acts 1:1-3). The disciples, shortly thereafter, asked Jesus if He were now going to restore the Kingdom to Israel. Jesus said it was not their prerogative to know the time table of the Father (Acts 1:6-7).
 - e. Instead, they would receive power to be Jesus’ witnesses. I take it their assignment was not to begin the kingdom but to recruit disciples for the coming Kingdom (Acts 1:8).
 - f. Far from calling believing Israelis all over the world back to the land of Israel to establish the Kingdom, God called Peter to be the Apostle to the alien Diaspora, the Dispersed Ones of Israel. That is the proper designation for believing Israelis. The Kingdom has not begun, even for the Believers. They continue to be part of the believing Diaspora – away from Israel (1 Peter 1:1).
 - g. Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13). We are living in the Times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24), not the Age of the Kingdom, which will be the Age of Israeli superiority (Isaiah 2:1-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 60:1-22).

- h. The whole purpose of Romans 9-11 is that, if God has brought salvation to the Gentiles, what on earth is He doing with Israel? Has he crossed Israel out of His plan? Rom. 9-11 answers a hearty, “May It Never Be!!!” If the side-lining of Israel means salvation for the world, what will the return of Israel to salvation mean for the Gentiles but a RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD! (Rom. 11:12, 15)

13. Closing Thoughts

- a. It is possible for well-meaning Christians to be on different sides of a theological issue.
- b. I have presented my views. I do not claim to have the last word on the subject. One day, I plan to take Remedial Theology 101, 102, 103, etc. as taught by Jesus Himself or one of the Apostles or Prophets. I anticipate learning a great deal and finding out and correcting the inaccuracies of my understanding.
- c. Above all, I hope and pray that having a difference of opinion will not disrupt our fellowship!

James T. Bartsch, May 4, 2023