**Was the Kingdom Delayed?**

# Introduction

## Scholars agree that Matthew wrote to prove Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, but the agreement ends here. We still must determine the nature of his kingdom, the timing of his rule, Israel's identity, and God’s response to Israel rejecting Christ as King—including whether God postponed or delayed the arrival of Israel’s kingdom.

# Do You Agree or Disagree?

To explore your ideas on this vital subject, please circle A, U, or D beside each statement below to show whether you Agree, are Unsure, or Disagree with the teaching.

## Christ’s kingdom will have the same political nature as that promised by Isaiah A U D

## Christ is ruling on the throne of David right now A U D

## Matthew’s reference to “Israel” today designates all Christians A U D

## God rejected Israel, so the nation has no prophetic future remaining A U D

## God delayed the kingdom for ethnic Israel after the nation rejected Christ A U D

# Contrasting the Major Views

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| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Issues*** | ***Covenant View*** | ***Dispensational View*** |
| *Nature of the Kingdom* | Spiritual in the present age | Spiritual in the present age but also political after Christ returns |
| *Time of Christ’s Rule* | Present | Future (except progressives) |
| *Israel* | Believers (Jew & Gentile) identifying with Abraham’s faith | Ethnic descendants of Abraham through Isaac |
| *Nature of God’s Rejection* | Rejected ethnic Israel and replaced them with the church as the “new Israel” | Rejected ethnic Israel until the latter days when Jews will trust in Messiah |
| *View on a kingdom postponement* | Rejected by all covenant scholars since God no longer deals with ethnic Israel as an entity | Accepted by many dispensationalists but rejected by the progressive dispensationalists |

# Matthew’s Teaching

## What kingdom was John talking about when he announced, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matt. 3:17 NLT)? Unless we have good reason to think otherwise, we should assume that John (and Jesus, 4:17) referred to the same kingdom lost in the OT times—a literal, political, geographical kingdom. This finds support in Matthew, where Jesus notes that the kingdom would be one in which “when the world is made new, and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (19:28). See also pages 78b-d.

## Note also that in Matt. 19:28 Christ saw this kingdom as *future* over which he would reign (see also pages 78f-g). While grammatically, “the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matt. 3:17) could also be rendered as “has come” (= is present now) or “is coming soon,” Matthew is clear that there was a conditional element here—to repent. This is consistent with numerous OT prophecies declaring Israel’s repentance as a requisite for the kingdom's arrival (e.g., Zech. 12:10-14). Since Israel did not repent, Jesus is not presently ruling over the nation from Jerusalem in fulfillment of Isaiah 2:4.

## As to the nature of “Israel” and God’s rejection of the nation noted above, nothing in Matthew or the NT indicates that the identity of the nation ever changed to refer instead to the church. The term still refers today to ethnic descendants of Jacob (see pages 131-132 in the Romans notes).

## But was the kingdom *delayed*? And what does this mean anyway? To say that the kingdom was postponed does *not* mean that God changed his mind as if he were fickle anymore than God “changed his mind” not to destroy Nineveh. It simply means that the kingdom in its fullness did not arrive since Israel did not repent. Matthew’s gospel teaches the postponement of the kingdom in various ways:

### The nation is encouraged to repent only until the climactic rejection of Christ in Matthew 12 when Israel’s leaders attribute his healing power to Satan. After this point, Jesus begins to speak in parables to introduce the present age between his two comings, which was not previously revealed in the OT.

### In the parable of the landowner (Matt. 21:33-46), the spurned vineyard ends up being given to others. Still, it is the same vineyard—not something else (21:41). Thus, the same kingdom promised to Israel by God will be given to this “nation that will produce the proper fruit” (21:43), referring to the believing Israel of the last days.

# A Problem and Response

## But what about Matthew 21:43, where Jesus declared after the Jewish leaders rejected him, “I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit”? Isn’t this “nation” the church?

## This might seem plausible in light of Gentiles being called a nation (Rom. 10:19; 1 Pet. 2:9-10), but the use of the singular need not refer to the church. Instead, “Jesus was using the term ‘nation’ in the sense of generation (cf. Matt. 23:36),”[[1]](#footnote-1) so it more likely refers to a future nation of Israel that repents (cf. Matt. 21:18-22; Rom. 11:26-27).

# Conclusion

The rejection of Messiah by Israel forfeited that generation from experiencing the kingdom's blessings. However, a future nation remains where all of Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:26-27) to experience God’s promise of the kingdom. As noted many times in the OT (e.g., Isa. 65–66), Gentiles will join that kingdom.

1. Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary,* eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: SP Pub., 1983), 2:71. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)