

Was the Church Predicted by the Prophets?

Bible Answers About The Church

In the religious world there is a common concept that the Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth to set up or establish His kingdom, but because He was rejected by the Jews, He postponed His kingdom and set up the church instead. Those who hold to this view believe that Jesus will set up His kingdom on earth when He returns the second time. This concept relegates the church to the role of a stop-gap arrangement, a kind of after -thought conceived by Christ to provide something to fill the gap between His return to the Father and His return to the earth. It is also believed that the prophets said nothing about the church since they saw only the first coming of the Christ and His yet to come, earthly kingdom. Therefore, the question, "Was the church predicted by the Prophets?" is appropriate and deserves a Scriptural answer.

In order to arrive at the correct answer, it is absolutely necessary to understand that in the Bible the kingdom and the house of the Lord in the prophecy of the Old Testament often refers to the church of the New Testament. Jesus predicted that He would build His church, (Matthew 16:18). Jesus called His church "the kingdom" in the very next verse, (Matthew 16:19). Therefore, the church and the kingdom in this sense are the same. Christ is the head of both the church and the kingdom, (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 1 Timothy 6:15). The terms of admission are the same, (John 3:3-5; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22, 23). Those in the church are also in the kingdom, (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 15:24). The apostle Paul said, "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Not only do we understand from these passages that the terms church and kingdom often refer to one and the same thing, but also a careful reading of many other passages will necessitate such a conclusion.

The idea of the Kingdom of God appears often in the Old Testament: (Exodus 19:6; 2 Samuel 7:12-13; 1 Chronicles 29:11; 2 Chronicles 13:8; Psalms 22:28; 45:6; 103:19; 145:11-13; Isaiah 2:2-3; 9:6-7; 62:3; Micah 4:78; and Obadiah 21). It is important to notice that when the duration of the Kingdom is referred to it is always unending, forever. "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations" (Psalms 145:13). There is no kingdom mentioned in the Bible as lasting for only a millennium as some are teaching today.

The prophet Isaiah is called the "Messianic prophet" because of his many references to the coming Messiah and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. The New Testament shows conclusively that Isaiah was writing about Christ and the Christian era. "For this is He that was spoken by the prophet Esaias" (Matthew 3:3). "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet" (Matthew 4:14). It was the same prophet who said, "Now it will come about that In the last days, the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say,

'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.' For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

In examining Isaiah's statements relative to the coming of the church/ kingdom the following points must be emphasized. First, the time of the kingdom's establishment would be "the last days." That expression has reference to the period known as the Christian age. Peter quoted from Joel and declared that the "last days" began on Pentecost (Acts 2:16 -17). Second, Isaiah calls the kingdom of the Messiah "the Lord's house" and says that it "will be exalted above the hills." The Lord's house is referring to the church (1 Timothy 3:15). Third, the kingdom would be composed of all people. "All nations shall flow unto it." One of the unique features of the church as contrasted with fleshly Israel lies in this statement. In the kingdom of the New Testament, there are no racial, national, or sexual barriers. We are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). On Pentecost Peter showed how this prophecy was fulfilled. "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). All human beings are included in the gracious provisions of the new covenant. Fourth, the law was to emanate from Zion and "the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." The Messianic age would be inaugurated by a new revelation, a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13). It would not be based on the revelation God made to Moses. The new message, this new covenant, would be sounded forth throughout the world "beginning at Jerusalem." The first gospel sermon ever preached was on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem and from there it went forth "in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Finally, the new era was to be a time of peace. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." This verse could not apply to fleshly Israel because that nation continued to engage in carnal war until its final overthrow. In contrast to Israel, the church of our Lord is not spread by carnal warfare; its nature and its mission are characterized by peace. Jesus came and preached peace to Jews and Gentiles alike (Ephesians 2:17). The church/kingdom of the Lord must be a militant body, but its weapons are not carnal and its combat is spiritual (Eph. 6:10-17).

One must consider other prophecies of the Old Testament like the second chapters of Daniel or Joel. Even then these three chapters from the prophets touch only the hem of the garment of Old Testament predictions relating to Christ and His church/ kingdom. Yes, the Old Testament prophets certainly did consider the church and predict its establishment. Therefore, the church was not something different from the kingdom and it is not today some stop-gap arrangement until Christ comes again to set up His kingdom. The kingdom/church is now in existence.

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