Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

It might surprise you to learn that what you mean when you pray “*Your kingdom come*” is not what many other Christians mean. And that is because many of those in the wider Christian church, hold to a theology known as **dispensationalism**. For example, if you listen to preachers like Rev’s David Jeremiah, Chuck Swindoll, Chuck Missler, and Charles Stanley, you will hear dispensational theology. And if you have read or watched the ‘Left Behind’ books and movies, that is dispensational theology. It is also the theology that you are most likely to hear on Radio Rhema, and the theology of most Christian school teachers at non-denominational Christian schools. Now, I want to be clear here, these are brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. They take faith in Christ and the Bible very seriously. We have much in common with them. Nevertheless, because this view is so widespread, we need to know about it so that we can recognize it and remain committed to what the Bible teaches about the kingdom to come.

Now, I have given you all a **handout**. It is not exhaustive. But we will refer to it today and hopefully you can look it over in more detail later in the week.

So, I will first walk us through **the theology of dispensationalism**. Then we will look at **how this theology affects a believer’s understanding of the kingdom**. And then we will be ready to see **what are praying for when we pray, “*Your kingdom come*.”**

1. So, first of all, **the theology of dispensationalism**.
	1. ‘Dispensations’ are periods of human history, each with a different way that God related to humans. It is a fairly recent theology that only really arose in the latter part of the 1800’s. It exploded in popularity largely due to a Bible named the Scofield Reference Bible. And that is because that Bible had Scofield’s interpretation of the Bible in the notes, and he held to dispensationalism.
	2. And if you look at the timeline chart on your handout, you will see that all of history is divided into **seven** **dispensations**. And each dispensation involves God testing man, man failing, and God’s judgment on his failing.
		1. The first dispensation was that of **Innocence**.
			1. It lasted from Genesis 1-3 or from Creation to the Fall.
			2. The test was the command not to eat of the tree, man failed the test, and the judgment was removal from the Garden.
		2. The second dispensation was that of **Conscience**.
			1. It lasted from Genesis 4-7 or from Cain to the flood.
			2. The test was the proper use of conscience, man failed the test, to the point as Genesis 6:4 says, “*Every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all of the time*,” and the judgment was the flood.
		3. The third dispensation was the one of **Government**.
			1. It lasted from Genesis 8-11 or from Noah to Babel.
			2. The test was how man would spread out and rule in society, the failure was the Tower of Babel, and the judgment was the confusion of languages.
		4. The fourth was that of **Promise**.
			1. It lasted from Genesis 12-Exodus 18 or from Abraham until Israel arrived at Sinai.
			2. The test was keeping the covenant God made with Abraham, man failed, and the judgment was slavery in Egypt.
		5. The fifth was that of **Law**.
			1. It lasted from Exodus 18-Acts 2 or from Mt Sinai all the way through to the Day of Pentecost.
			2. The test was for Israel to keep the 10 Commandments, they failed, and the judgment was exile, and eventually the destruction of the Temple.
		6. And now, according to dispensationalists, we live in the sixth dispensation, that of the **Church** or **Grace**. And there are some variations about the exact order of the last part of this dispensation, but this is the most common view:
			1. It began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
			2. The test is belief in Jesus Christ. Failure is to choose unbelief. Most people will choose not to believe and be punished in hell.
			3. And during this dispensation, Israel is once again re-formed as a nation, in the land of Israel. And towards the end of it, Anti-Christ will come. And then there will be a great tribulation, or persecution of the church and Israel for seven years.
			4. And either during or at the end of the tribulation, believers who are still alive will be raptured up to heaven, just taken right up out of their beds or cars or rugby scrums, leaving just unbelievers on earth.
			5. And then the Second Coming happens; Christ comes down to earth, with all the saints who had died or been raptured, and together they win the battle of Armageddon, which will be fought near Israel. Christ defeats the Anti-Christ and enters Jerusalem to establish His kingdom, *on earth*, which then lasts for 1000 years, or the millennium.
		7. And this is the seventh and last dispensation, that of the **Messianic kingdom**.
			1. It is Christ reigning from within a restored Israel. So, the worldwide church was temporary, now it is Israel again. And the temple is rebuilt, and the laws and ceremonies of the Old Testament return. And only those are allowed in this kingdom who will submit themselves to the rule of Christ. There will be unbelievers living outside this kingdom, and right near the end Satan will be released to lead them against Israel again, but this is when Christ will destroy all dominion, authority, and power, as we read in 1 Cor. 15, and ultimately bring the Day of Judgment, where unbelievers will be sentenced to eternal hell with the devil and his demons.

And that, brothers and sisters, is the Avondalepedia summary of dispensational theology.

1. So, now we can switch our attention to **how this theology affects a believer’s understanding of the kingdom**.
	1. We have already noted a whole bunch of terms, many of which might be new to you. But here is another. It is **pre-millennialism**. Millennial views have to do with the 1000 year reign of Jesus that is described in Revelation 20. And the three views are premillennial – Jesus comes *before* the 1000 reign, postmillennial – Jesus comes after the 1000 years, or Amillennial – there is no literal 1000 years; it is just referring to the whole time between Jesus’ first and second coming. And this is not a salvation issue. But the majority Reformed view is Amillennialism – no literal 1000 year reign. But dispensationalists, as we have seen, are pre-millennial – they believe that Jesus will come down to earth and reign in Israel as king for 1000 years. So, can you see how that idea would affect a person’s understanding of this part of the Lord’s Prayer? When they pray, “*Your kingdom come*,” they have in view the 1000 year reign of Jesus Christ, on earth.
	2. And I want to show you one of the reasons why they understand kingdom to mean this. Turn back with me please to **Matthew 4:17**. That is where Matthew tells us about Jesus’ mission, which was to preach about the “*kingdom of heaven*.” And that phrase, “*kingdom of heaven*,” is used 32 times in Matthew’s Gospel, mostly By Jesus Himself. But it is not used once in Mark, Luke, or John. Their preferred term is the “*kingdom of God*.” And because Matthew says, “*kingdom of heaven*,” and the other Gospels say, “*kingdom of God*,” dispensationalists believe they are talking about two different dispensations. Matthew is talking about the kingdom that Jesus offered the Jews when He was here on earth. So, if they had accepted Him, He would have stayed and ruled in Jerusalem and there would only have been five dispensations. But they rejected Him. And so, this kingdom was postponed, if you like. And the church age began, the sixth dispensation. And after it will come the seventh dispensation. And that is the kingdom that Mark and Luke talk about. That is why they talk about the “*kingdom of God*” while Matthew talks about the “*kingdom of heaven*.” So, you can see again that our dispensational friends desire to be biblical. But sadly, congregation, they make too much of this distinction. And this is so because of a ‘Matthew reason’ and a ‘whole-of-the-Bible reason.’
		1. The **Matthew reason** is the Jewish focus of his Gospel.
			1. You see, Matthew wrote with a mainly Jewish audience in mind. And for the Jews, the word heaven was very often used as a substitute for the name of God. For fear of blasphemy, Jews just tried to avoid saying God at all. That’s why, when Jesus was talking about making oaths, He revealed that the Jews had oaths to do with heaven, and the temple, and the altar. They would use any other religious thing to avoid using the name of God. So, this is one of the reasons why Matthew speaks of the “*kingdom of heaven*.”
			2. But Matthew also constantly holds Jesus before the Jews as the promised Messiah King. And so, when he speaks of the kingdom of heaven in relation to Jesus, He is connecting Jesus with the Father. But this is a key reason why the Jews rejected Jesus. In their eyes, He was just a man, and, He was not willing to be the type of King that they wanted – a Roman bashing, earthly king!
			3. And this is **the great irony of dispensationalism**. You see the Jews wanted an earthly kingdom! They would gladly have set Jesus up as a king in the temple! But this was not the kingdom Jesus offered them. He came to die and rise and ascend to heaven where He would reign in the hearts and minds of those who put their faith in Him and followed Him – both Jew and Gentile. But the Jews had no interest in this sort of spiritual kingdom at all.
			4. So, Matthew’s kingdom is not a different kingdom than Mark and Luke’s. It is simply described differently because of the specific audience in view.
		2. But there is also a **whole-of-the-Bible reason** why dispensationalists make too much of the “*kingdom of heaven*” reference in Matthew.
			1. And to see this we need to see how covenant theology aids us in our understanding of kingdom. So, look at the handout and the Westminster chapter. We won’t read the whole chapter, just the points that will help us here:
				1. Note, firstly, from **article 1**, that the distance between God as Creator and mankind as Creature is so great that the only way we may enjoy Him is “by way of a covenant.”
				2. And **articles 2 & 4** reveal to us the two covenants that God made with mankind – the covenants of works and grace. The CoW was made with Adam in the Garden. Because of the Fall, however, mankind made himself incapable of keeping that covenant and so God replaced it with the CoG, which we read about in Genesis 3:15. And this covenant of grace enables man to enjoy relationship with God *through faith in Jesus Christ*. And this covenant governs the rest of human history.
				3. But now note **articles 5 & 6**. It divides the rest of history, after the fall, into two major periods; the time of law and the time of gospel. Both have in view faith in Jesus Christ. But how they *reveal* Jesus is different.

In the OT, the covenant was “administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the Passover lamb, and other types and ordinances given to the Jewish people, all of which foreshadowed Christ to come.”

While in the NT, as we see in **article 6**, Jesus Christ is revealed by “the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper.”

* + - * 1. But note lastly in this connection, the final words of article 6, “Therefore, there are not two covenants of grace differing in substance, but only one, under***various administrations***.” And you know what? The original English version of the Westminster used the word dispensations! We too subdivide human history into different administrations or dispensations. The key difference, though, is that they are all about one covenant and faith in Christ. What changes is that God progressively reveals more and more about the coming King Jesus in each dispensation. So, they are not entirely new dispensations, with a whole new way of God relating to His people, but a time when God reveals more about Jesus, which reaches its high point with the arrival of Jesus in the flesh!

And so, firstly, to **Adam**, in Genesis 3, God simply revealed that mankind would from now on be divided into two classes, the children of the devil and the children of God. And from the children of God would come one who would crush the devil.

To **Noah**, in Genesis 9, God further unfolds the covenant by revealing that His kingdom is not about the earth, which is cursed by sin and needs to be destroyed by a flood as a symbol of God’s future and final judgment, but about a king who would come from Noah’s family.

To **Abraham**, in Genesis 15, God unfolds more about the covenant by speaking of a chosen people and a Promised kingdom Land and giving a sacramental sign in circumcision.

And then comes the next unfolding of the covenant as the 12 tribes of Israel come into existence, and the Kingly line of Judah was established, and the law of the King was given on **Sinai** in Exodus 20, and Passover was added to circumcision, and blood sacrifice was spelled out, revealing more about how Jesus would save His people.

2 Samuel 7 is where God next unfolds more of His covenant as He appears to **David** and promises him that one of His sons will reign, eternally, on the throne of Israel.

And finally, in **Jeremiah 31**, we read about a new covenant – the coming of Jesus in all His glory – God with us! And then He came, and He perfectly obeyed all God’s commandments, and He died and rose again for the forgiveness of our sins. And He ascended to heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit to build His church, which would be a blessing to the world. But He also promised to come again and to bring in the new heavens and the new earth.

And this is the whole-of-the-Bible reason why Matthew talks about the “*kingdom of heaven*.” Heaven had come down to earth in Jesus! And when He ascended and poured out His Spirit, Jesus would reign in and through the church. And at the end of time, Jesus would return and bring in the new heavens and the new earth, and reign, together with His people.

1. And so, putting all of this together, now we are ready to see **what we are praying for when we pray, “*Your kingdom come*.”**
	1. Is the kingdom of Christ a future earthly kingdom of a 1000 year reign in Jerusalem, as our dispensational brethren believe it to be? Is that what we are asking for when we pray, “*Your kingdom come*”? No.
		1. In **Matthew 28**, Jesus commissioned His disciples by saying, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations…*”
			1. So, is the reign of Jesus restricted to earth? No. “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*.”
			2. And will Jesus get this authority in the future? No. “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*.”
		2. **Ephesians 1:21-23** says that Jesus is right now “*far above* *all rule and authority, power and dominion*, *and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church*.”
		3. Jesus reigns, now, from heaven! He is, as we read earlier in **1 Corinthians 15**, putting “*all His enemies under His feet*.” And He is doing this as more and people receive Him as their Saviour and are added into the church and taught to obey all of His commandments.
		4. So, when dispensationalists pray, “Your kingdom come,” there is a lot of politics in view, with the nation of Israel, and Middle East events, and the foreign policy of the US government about Israel, etc. It is an ‘Israel focus.’
		5. But as Answer 48 explains, to pray “Your kingdom come” means,

*rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way*

*that more and more we submit to you.*

*Keep your church strong, and add to it.*

*Destroy the devil's work;*

*destroy every force which revolts against you*

*and every conspiracy against your Word.*

* + 1. And then, when the full number of all God’s elect have come to faith in Christ, Jesus will come again, just as He promised, and we will rule with Him in the new heavens and the new earth. And this is what the catechism means when it finishes the explanation of what praying “*Your kingdom come*” means, by saying,

*Do this until your kingdom is so complete and perfect*

*that in it you are all in all.*

 It is a church and personal holiness, and a longing for the return of Christ focus.

Earlier in the week I was talking to a brother who said that, partly because of growing older but also because of a growing awareness of sin and all of its awful consequences, he found himself more and more longing for the return of Jesus.And I could only agree, wholeheartedly!Is it so with you also? **Ephesians 6:12** tells us that “*our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world* *and* *against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*.” We are in a battle! And not one of us could struggle against the forces of such a devilish kingdom, if we did not know that King Jesus reigns, supreme, now! But **2 Timothy 2:11-12** says this about King Jesus, “*Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him*.” And we will do this after we have heard Him say, “*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world*.”

So, it seems fitting that we end by praying the words of **Revelation 22:20**: “*He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*”