



KINGDOM OF GOD SERIES

APOSTLES, FATHERS,  
AND REFORMERS

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JOHN BAYNE ASCHAM

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# **APOSTLES, FATHERS, AND REFORMERS**

**BY  
JOHN BAYNE ASCHAM**



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## INTRODUCTION

### THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Too often in human history the sharp contrast between actual conditions and the higher demands of the Christian ideal has discouraged those upon whom rested the responsibility for making that ideal real. A short-range view of life has obscured the actual growth of the Kingdom which the larger perspective of history reveals. In the face of the overwhelming preponderance of sin and selfishness in the world the Christian Church has again and again contented itself with snatching as many brands as possible from the burning, without, at the same time, seeking to organize the constructive forces of life and of society for the seemingly impossible task of putting out the conflagration. Thus the actual process of the Kingdom's coming among men has proceeded for the most part "without observation," like the first growth of the seed that has been buried in the soil.

It is possible to-day, in the light of the completed records of the Old and New Testaments and the subsequent history of the Christian centuries, to discover definite stages of advance with successive landmarks of progress in the gradual establishment of the reign of God in individual lives and in the institutions of mankind. Such a survey of progress already achieved should hearten the organized Christian forces in their forward look and their endeavor to establish still more firmly among men the principles and ideals of the Kingdom. It should encourage the individual to redouble his efforts and inspire in him an unfaltering confidence in the ultimate realization and triumph of God's rule. Herein lies the purpose of the special course of study in the development of the kingdom of God in which this volume constitutes one textbook.



## INTRODUCTION

Beginning with a brief consideration of the fundamentals of religion and the nature of man and of Deity, the studies trace the development of religious experience and ideas among the Hebrews and the Jewish people down to the beginning of the Christian era. This early period, covering the development of the Kingdom in Old Testament times, is presented in two volumes of twenty-six study chapters each, the division being made at the point in the historical development following the rise of eighth-century prophetism and the fall of Samaria. In similar manner two volumes are devoted to the Life and Teachings of Jesus which are assumed to be of central importance in the forward and upward movement of humanity.

Subsequent studies present in two volumes a survey of the development of the Kingdom since the time of Christ, including a discussion of those social-religious movements of the present day, the support and inspiration for which are to be found primarily in the Christian conception of God and the world. This volume presents briefly the story of the Kingdom since the time of Christ, as this has developed through the Christian centuries under the inspiring leadership of *Apostles, Fathers and Reformers*. The concluding volume of the series is entitled *The Christian Hope*, and presents in constructive form the abiding faith of the Christian fellowship in the final triumph of the kingdom of God.

It is confidently expected that these studies will serve a two-fold purpose. As elective courses for adult Bible classes interested in this vital and most fascinating of all studies, their usefulness will be unquestioned. At the same time they are intended to meet the increasing demand for modern textbooks written in scholarly spirit but popular style for preparatory and high schools and for advanced groups in week-day religious instruction in local parishes. That they are admirably suited for either purpose will be evident from an examination of any one of the volumes in the series.

THE EDITOR.

## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

THIS volume is devoted to a brief description of the chief incidents in the development of Christianity from the beginning of the church at Jerusalem to the close of the Reformation.

A true history of the kingdom of God during these centuries would not be identical with the history of the church during the same period.

"God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform."

Undoubtedly there were influences not controlled by the church making for the Christianization of the world. The church, however, has been the chief agent in the propagation of the gospel. Frequently unfaithful to its own conscience, often blind to the plain teachings of its Founder and Master, sometimes guilty of unpardonable crimes in the name of religion, the church has not advanced the cause of Christianity according either to its opportunities or its powers. Nevertheless, the church has been the chief promoter of God's kingdom in the life and affairs of men. It has been the chief institution to carry civilization onward. It filled the breach caused by the decay of the Roman Empire. It molded and guided the barbarism of the pagan invaders of the old seats of civilization and transformed them into Christian peoples. During many centuries it was the sole agency that kept alive the hope of the kingdom of God.

It is only those who know the church at its best who should exercise the privilege of pointing out its faults. The historian is well aware of the merits and the defects of the church. The Christian historian understands that the failures of the church have arisen through want of loyalty to the teachings and the Spirit of its Lord. To point out

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the errors of the church is for him only another way of calling attention to the glories of the Christ.

It is believed, then, that a clear understanding of the facts presented in this volume not only will make the student conversant with the outlines of church history of the first fifteen centuries of our era but will also clarify and strengthen his faith in the coming of God's kingdom and will better enable him to take some true part in the enthronement of Christ in the life and institutions of mankind.

## DIRECTIONS FOR STUDY

**READ** the chapter assigned for study without stopping to examine Biblical or other references. After having obtained a general idea of the contents and purposes of the chapter reread it more carefully. Examine all references. Do not be wearied by their multiplicity. It is only by repeated use of them that the material upon which these studies are based becomes familiar. One of the objectives of this book is to put the student in touch with the source material for a study of the rise and development of the church.

Read as many as possible of the references given for reading. Examine these books. Become familiar with their appearance. Obtain a general idea of their contents. It is a fine achievement to be able to speak intelligently of informational and thought-provoking books.

Use a notebook. Make brief abstracts of your reading. Write answers to the questions for class discussion. Leave space to add such facts as may be brought out in the class hour. Writing compels a greater exactness than does an oral recitation. Learn to be exact.

Bear in mind that this study of the founders and leaders of the church is designed to do more than familiarize you with the greater facts of the Kingdom's progress: it is intended also to quicken you to become a worthier citizen of the Kingdom. At the close of each chapter is a brief devotional application. Meditate upon the ideas there offered. Whatever noble thoughts or resolves they awaken in you record in your notebook. Your spiritual progress is as important as your intellectual development.



## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

THIS chapter outlines the earliest steps in the beginnings of organized Christianity. The first disciples during the public ministry of Jesus were bound together by the rare personality of Jesus; now they were held together not only by a consciousness of his invisible presence but also by a commanding sense of being participants with him in a great mission. They were his forerunners to prepare the way for his second advent to set up his kingdom in irresistible glory. Measured by their beliefs and conduct and by the great events that issued from their labors, these church-building Jews are the marvel of the ages. They are worthy of our deepest sympathetic interest in all they believed and did.

#### THE RISEN CHRIST

**Reveals Himself to His Discouraged Disciples.**—The immediate effect of the death of Jesus upon his disciples was to scatter them. This Jesus had predicted (Matthew 26. 31). He had assumed that they would return to their homes in Galilee (Mark 14. 27, 28). Whatever were the manifestations of Jesus to his disciples in Jerusalem after his resurrection, these alone were not sufficient to convince them that death had not shorn him of his majestic leadership in the bringing in of the kingdom of God. Jesus, therefore, met his discouraged and crushed followers in some of the treasured haunts in Galilee and so assured them of his regnant Messiahship that they returned to Jerusalem full of faith in the triumph of the kingdom of their love and dreams (Matthew 28. 7, 16; Mark 16. 7; John 21. 1-23).

**Restores Their Confidence in Him and in Their Mission.**—It is impossible to overstate the significance of the fact

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that in a little while after the crucifixion of Jesus his disciples, who had fled, came together again in Jerusalem ready to proclaim that the death of Jesus had not ruined their Messianic beliefs and hopes. The death of Jesus had seemed the end of all their expectations. He seemed no longer the Redeemer of Israel (Luke 24. 21). His death, despite all Jesus had said about it, was unexpected; and whenever Jesus had spoken of rising from the dead, the disciples had not understood what he meant (Mark 9. 9, 10, 31, 32; Luke 18. 32-34). Now they are bold in proclaiming his resurrection. The rise of the church is the telling witness of our risen Lord, for it is inconceivable that the disciples would have returned to Jerusalem and begun to preach the gospel they had heard from Jesus and which they saw in his life and resurrection unless an unassailable conviction that he was alive controlled and inspired their lives.

**His Abiding Presence With the Disciples.**—It is important to understand what conception these first disciples waiting in Jerusalem had of Jesus, and what their relation to him was. Acts 1. 6; 2. 22-24, 32-36; 3. 20, 21 give us material for determining what was the disciples' new conception of Jesus. Jesus was to them "a man approved by God" during the years that led up to his death. Is there any hint that the disciples regarded Jesus as the Messiah until after his death and resurrection? The dominant idea they hold of Jesus after his resurrection is that he is indeed the Christ—that is, the Messiah of Jewish expectations. Since the Messianic Kingdom had not yet appeared, in what way do the disciples conceive Jesus to be related in the meanwhile to this Kingdom? See Acts 1. 11; 3. 20, 21. They do not think of Jesus as altogether enthroned in the heavens; he is also present with them, the authority for their preaching and the spiritual Comrade of their souls (Matthew 28. 18-20).

### THE TASK OF THE DISCIPLES

**A Summons to Witness for Jesus.**—The disciples, convinced by the resurrection and ascension of Jesus that he

## THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

was indeed the Messiah, felt themselves summoned by him to proclaim that Messiahship and the nearness of the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom. Great emphasis was put upon the resurrection (Acts 1. 22; 2. 24, 32). The burden of this earliest preaching was that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, had been raised from the dead and exalted into heaven. This resurrection and exaltation are the striking proofs of his Messiahship. Examine Acts 3. 19-21 carefully. It was believed that Jesus the Messiah was to abide in heaven until the dawn of the Messianic era, when God would send him to set up the Kingdom on earth. This time of restoration these earliest disciples thought was near at hand. Repentance on the part of the Jewish world and a recognition of the crucified Jesus as the Messiah would precipitate the golden age. The prophet Joel was used to prove that the new age was at hand. The spiritual quickening of Pentecost was regarded as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2. 28, 29). It is clear that Joel expected the outpouring of Jehovah's Spirit as one of the immediately preceding marks of the advent of the Messianic Kingdom. Acts 1. 11 indicates the same expectation that the advent of the Messianic age is not far removed.

**A Summons to Win Jews to Belief in Messiahship of Jesus.**—The disciples at this earliest date held almost the same views of the Kingdom as did their non-Christian brethren. The one difference was their belief that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah. It became their supreme task to win a similar recognition for him from the Jewish world. Prevalent Jewish Messianism had no teaching about a suffering and dying Messiah. Therefore, in proclaiming Jesus to be the Christ the disciples sought to show that the Scriptures foretold that the Messiah must die. See Acts 3. 18; 4. 10-12, 28; 5. 30-32, 42; 8. 32-35. This is the only use made of the death of Jesus in this earliest preaching. Instead of something to be glorified and to be exalted into a primary place in a scheme of salvation, as later preaching treated the crucifixion, the death of Jesus was considered by these earliest disciples something to be explained away, a dire calamity that



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threatened belief in his Messiahship. In the first days of their grief at his death and their joy in his rising again the disciples had not come to the full consciousness either of the kingdom that Jesus actually proclaimed or of the relation that his life and death sustained to the realization of the Kingdom purposes of God.

### PENTECOST

**Quickened by the Spirit of God.**—The significant feature of the spiritual experience of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. 1-42 is the consciousness of the disciples that their souls have been quickened by the presence within them of the Spirit of the living God. The disciples felt themselves summoned to a heroic task. It was no slight undertaking to convince their countrymen that a crucified Nazarene had come forth from his grave to be the Messiah and to summon their brethren to acknowledge this Christhood of Jesus and, by repentant lives, make ready for the swift coming of the kingdom of God. To pursue this mission God himself must equip them. He poured forth into their lives his Spirit, until they possessed the vision and the power to proclaim their message. That is the soul of the Pentecostal experience. It was not the sound, not the light, not the ecstatic speech, which constituted Pentecost; it was the play of the eternal Soul upon the lives of these disciples, who such a little while before had fled in fear and despair, until now, in the face of those who had condemned Jesus, they are preaching that he must be acknowledged as Christ by faith, repentance, and baptism.

**The Meaning of the "Tongues."**—In studying Acts 2. 1-42 note precisely the external accompaniments of this outpouring of the Spirit of God. Sound like the rushing of a mighty wind; appearances of light like flames of fire upon each of the disciples; and speech, not in the customary Aramaic, but in ecstatic, ejaculatory utterances, were the outward signs of an inward miracle. In the same or similar manner this form of utterance appeared later in the church. See especially 1 Corinthians 12. 10, 28, 30; 14. 1-33. "The glossolalia in the Corinthian church oc-