

The Already/Not yet Arrival of the Kingdom of God

Jesus the Messiah

Jesus came talking about fulfillment of the Jewish hope and demonstrating the reality of God's kingdom. In God's kingdom there were no blind or lame, so Jesus made the blind see and the lame walk. Though most Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, some did. In the years immediately after Jesus' resurrection, these followers of Jesus, all of whom were Jewish, had a problem. They proclaimed to all who would listen that Jesus truly was the long-expected Messiah, but it was also clear that evil and tragedy and suffering were still present in the world. Using Figure 1 as a guide, it's as if the Messiah had come, but the Kingdom of God had not! To the average Jew, the answer was simple – Jesus wasn't really the Messiah, hence the world still awaited the coming of the Kingdom of God.

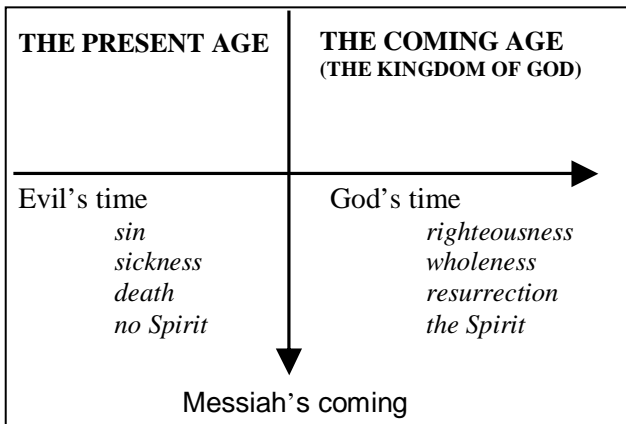


Figure 1. Jewish expectations in Jesus' day
(figures from Fee's *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*)

exactly that! This framework determined everything about the early Christians – how they lived, how they thought, what they wrote, how they worshipped . . . everything. The new order had begun. They were new creations (2 Cor 5:17). They were now the people of the Spirit. . . and, truly, so are we!

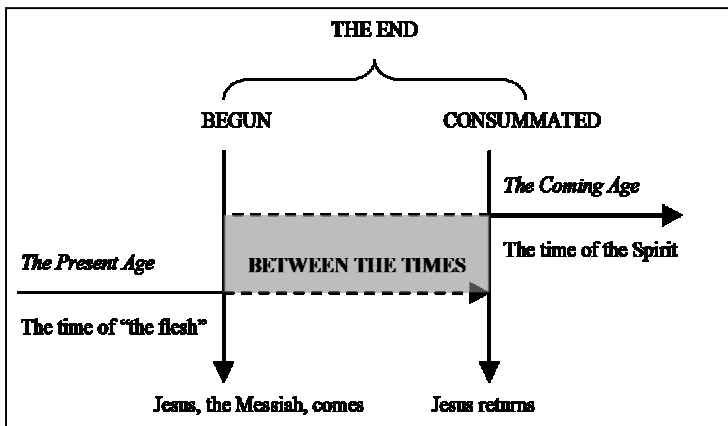


Figure 2. The Christians' new perspective: already/not yet

Already/Not yet

But Jesus' disciples had seen, touched, and eaten with the risen Christ. They knew that God's anointed had indeed come. Thus, the problem was not with Jesus but with the Jewish perspective depicted in Figure 1. In the writings of the New Testament, we see a new perspective emerging, as depicted in Figure 2.

Yes, Jesus was the Messiah. Yes, God's kingdom had come – but not yet in all its fullness! The time of renewal had begun with the Messiah's coming but the consummation of this transformation would await his return. The Christians came to understand that they lived "between times" when God's kingdom had come *already*, but *not yet*. I really can't overemphasize how important to our reading of the NT is our understanding of this "already/not yet" perspective. When Paul writes that Christians are the ones on whom the "ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11), he means

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As Gordon Fee writes, we are empowered by God's Spirit to live the life of the future, of God's kingdom, in the present age. We are to be, in Paul's phrase, "ambassadors for Christ," carrying God's message of reconciliation and hope to the world, in what we do and say every day. We are new creations not just for our own sakes but for the sake of all the world. Paul understood that in his journeys he was crisscrossing the Mediterranean founding colonies of a new human race, a people born from above, born of the Spirit (John 3). St. Andrew is just such a colony. It can be hard for us to think of ourselves this way . . . but that is the nature of transformation. It may take the butterfly awhile to comprehend its own rebirth. We may not always feel like new creations. We certainly don't always act like new creations. But we are. *This is the real world.*