

Arbor Foundations

29 – What is the Nature of the Kingdom?

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Key Ideas / Biblical Basis

Definition of the Kingdom

1. Biblical theologian Graeme Goldsworthy who believes that the Kingdom of God is the unifying theme of the Bible explains the kingdom as “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule.” Liking alliteration, I like altering this to God’s people in God’s place under God’s power.
2. George Ladd offers a more robust definition as follows: “The Kingdom is primarily the dynamic reign of kingly rule of God, and derivatively, the sphere in which the rule is experienced. In biblical idiom, the Kingdom is not identified with its subjects. They are the people of God’s rule who enter it, live under it, and are governed by it.”
3. Clearly a disagreement between these two scholars on whether the people of God is the kingdom of God or not, so which is correct?

Summary of Biblical Treatment

1. Pentateuch -
 - a. Genesis 1-2
 - i. It is the power of God’s creative Word that Moses repeats
 - ii. Adam created as vice-regents over all Creation (Gen. 1:28)
 - b. Genesis 3
 - i. 3:4 Serpent attacks the very words of God.
 - ii. 3:14-19 Vice-regency broken, but a Seed promised.
 - c. Genesis 49
 - i. Jacob gathers together his children to tell them what will come in “days to come/last days.” (v. 1)
 - ii. Judah’s section in v. 9-12 – kingly reign of a seed of Judah who will have the obedience of all the peoples.
 - d. Numbers 24:14-19
 - i. Balaam invites the people to come, so that he may say what Israel will do to Moab in “latter days/last days” (v. 14)
 - ii. From Israel will come a star and a scepter (see Gen. 49:10) which will crush the forehead (Gen. 3:15) of Moab, and exercise dominion.

- e. Deuteronomy 31:28-32:43
 - i. Moses calls the elders to assemble that he may tell them of evil that will befall them in “days to come/last days” (31:28-29).
 - ii. Moses then speaks of the Lord as a Rock, promising deliverance to those who treat him as such and shame for those who seek other rocks as refuge.
- 2. Samuel -
 - a. I Samuel 2:1-10 – The Lord will raise the humble and lower the haughty until he raises up his anointed.
 - i. v. 2 God is the only true Rock
 - ii. v. 4-8 The exalted will be brought low and the lowly exalted
 - iii. v. 3, 9 The Lord will do this based off of the humility of pride of those involved
 - iv. v. 10 Hannah is praying for a king when there is no king.
 - b. II Samuel 7:8-17 – Son of David will inherit an eternal kingdom.
- 3. Isaiah -
 - a. Isaiah 2:1-5
 - i. Latter days – last days
 - ii. Lifting up of Mount Zion such that all nations will go to Zion to hear the instruction (Torah) of the Lord
 - iii. The Lord will rule over all nations, such that there will be peace as all walk in the light of his instruction.
 - b. Isaiah 25:6-11
 - i. On this mountain, the Lord prepares a feast for all nations, where death will be no more and the veil is removed.
 - ii. Why? Because the Lord has spoken, just as in the Garden.
 - iii. So the people of God rejoice in their salvation because the Lord has brought low the haughty pride of Moab.
- 4. Daniel 2:31-45
 - a. The vision: Graven image with head of gold, chest of silver, thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and of clay was broken in pieces by a stone made without human hand, which became a mountain that filled the whole earth.
 - b. Interpretation: Succession of kingdoms until until the “God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (v. 44).
- 5. Synoptic Gospels – Focus in on Matthew 13 (x-ref Mark 4)
 - a. For most Gospel authors, language is kingdom of God, for Matthew, it is kingdom of heaven, seemingly emphasizing the origin of the kingdom itself.
 - b. Parable of the Sower (13:1-9, 18-23)
 - i. Word of the kingdom will produce varying results among those who hear it despite the same message being delivered in the same way

- ii. The Lord's Spirit determines the effect of the proclamation of the kingdom of God.
 - c. Explanation of the Parables (13:10-17, 34-35)
 - i. Some will know the secrets of the kingdom and some will not, and God may indeed speak in such a way as to ensure that only some receive it.
 - ii. Many prophets and righteous people in the Old Covenant era yearned to see the inauguration of the kingdom found in Jesus.
 - d. Parable of the Weeds (13:24-30, 36-43)
 - i. Those who are not a part of the kingdom will be allowed to grow alongside those of the kingdom, but in the end they will be cast into outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth.
 - ii. Some (such as Augustine) have used this parable to teach that the church is a mixed congregation of believers and unbelievers that will be separated in the last days, but this does not cohere with the text.
 - e. Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven (13:31-33)
 - i. The kingdom may start small, but it grows of itself until it leavens the whole lump.
 - f. Parables of the Hidden Treasure and Valuable Pearl (13:44-45)
 - i. The kingdom of Heaven is worth sacrificing all that we have in order to obtain it.
 - g. Parable of the Net (13:47-50)
 - i. The net will catch indiscriminately both good and evil, but despite appearances, the evil are not safe, and will be punished at the last days.
- 6. Gospel of John - The only use of kingdom language in the Gospel of John shows up in John 3 and John 18.
 - a. John 3's explanatory interpretation in 3:16-21 explains the language of the kingdom in terms of eternal life, which is described as knowing the Lord (John 17:3).
 - b. John 18:36 Christ's kingdom is not of this world; therefore, his servants do not fight his death.
- 7. Philippians 3:17-21 -
 - a. Imitate Paul (in his manner of thinking of 3:1-16) because not all walk in such a circumspect way.
 - b. v. 20-21 - we are presently citizens of heaven, but we await a Savior and future transformation of our lowly bodies to be like God's glorious bodies.
- 8. Hebrews 12:18-29 -
 - a. Superiority of our covenant and the heavenly Jerusalem over Mount Sinai.
 - b. God is shaking that which has been made in order to leave an unshakable kingdom.
 - c. Therefore, we ought to offer to God acceptable worship (I.e. chapter 13, particularly v. 15).

9. Revelation

- a. 1:5b-6 "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."
- b. 5:9-10 "Worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth."
- c. 11:15 "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."

Theological Formulation

1. God is at work to restore his kingdom in the hearts of men and within the world. Kingdom work is God's work and only he can accomplish it. The hope of the kingdom is men who serve God as priests and serve as his vice-regents.
Gen. 1-2, Ex. 19:5-6, Deut. 32, Dan. 2:44, Matt. 13, Heb. 12:25-29, I Pet. 2:9-10
2. The work of God in building his kingdom is through his anointed Messiah, who came and died on the cross, guaranteeing pardon for the sin which brought ruin to the kingdom and guaranteeing access to the kingdom to all who take refuge in him through faith and repentance.
Gen. 3:15-19, Gen 49:10, Num 24:17, I Sam 2:10, II Sam. 7, Isa 53, Ps. 2:12, Dan. 7:13-14, John 3:1-21, 14:1-11, Acts 4:12, Rom. 10:13, Phil. 3:20-21.
3. The kingdom of God is a future, end-time reality when God restores all things, making them all new in a world where there will be no tears, crying, or death, and all peoples will flow to the Lord to hear his instruction and worship him.
Gen. 49, Num. 24, Deut. 31-32, II Sam 7, Isa. 2, 25, Hos. 3:4-5, Dan. 8, Matt. 8:12-13, 13, I Pet. 1:3-12, Rev. 11:15, 21-22
4. Yet this kingdom has broken in through the creation of a new people who are a kingdom of priests unto the Lord with the implication that we worship the Lord and proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into his glorious light.
Heb. 12:25-29, I Pet 2:9-10, Rev. 1:5-6, 5:9-10

5. Given that it is God's work built on God's Word, already inaugurated through the finished work of Christ on the cross, the kingdom of which we now partake and the fullness of it that is forthcoming is unshakable and sure.

Deut. 32, Isa. 25:8, Ps. 1-2, Dan. 2:31-45, John 10, I Thess. 4:13-18, Heb. 12:15-29, I Pet. 1:3-12, Jude, Rev. 21-22

So What?

1. Building the kingdom through political or social justice endeavors is not the mission of the church. God is the one who builds his kingdom and the kingdom he is building is future, breaking in now through spiritual transformation of his people.
2. As a kingdom of priests, we ought to proclaim the majesties of the King who transformed us, and tell others of the kingdom (Matt. 24:14). As such, the mission of the church is proclamation of the inaugurated kingdom of God.
3. Given that we have an unshakable kingdom, we can rest assured that our present suffering or present sinfulness cannot prevent us from entering it and therefore "rest from our works as God did from his" (Heb. 4:10).
4. Knowing that the Lord's work is secure for us, we ought to worship him and give him thanks for the multitude of grace in our lives, living in such a way that our life and self is a sacrifice to him (Heb 12:25-13:17; Rom. 12:1-2).

For Further Study

Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*.

Goldsworthy, Graeme. *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. (p. 863-864).

Ladd, George Eldon. *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

Schreiner, Thomas. *The King in his Beauty*.