



Chapter 5: The story of God's Kingdom

A. How the story unfolds

1. Dominion over Creation

In Genesis 1:26-28 God gave to humans the responsibility of ruling over his creation. Even though God prepared the earth for human habitation, he left much of the future development of the earth and beyond for his people to oversee, "subdue the earth and fill it." In chapter 2 God planted a garden for Adam and Eve, but they were not restricted to the garden; they were to bring the raw materials of earth to their full potential. People were intended by God to be his agents for ruling the Kingdom of God upon earth. They were also expected to be partners with God in the completion of his creation.

Psalms 8 notes the seeming insignificance of man in comparison to the stars, but goes on to assert God's purpose that man, created lower than the angels, be in charge of all creation. Hebrews 2:5-9 quotes from Psalm 8 about humans ruling over God's creation. "So far we haven't seen humans do their job in God's Kingdom, but we do see Jesus in human form. He came not only to taste death for all of us, but also to rule as a man over God's realm."

2. Treason and Corruption

King Adam the First, by sin and rebellion, abdicated his authority over creation. The effects of sin corrupted human ability to reign. Instead of truly representing God and carrying out His goals for the universe, we became self-centered and unresponsive--and irresponsible. God did not cancel the creation mandate about ruling in God's Kingdom, but humanity has neglected or bungled the assignment because of sin.

Along with human corruption and death, our sin brought God's curse on the earth. The task of subduing, mastering, and filling the earth as God's ruler became more difficult. This additional challenge is represented by the 3 "W's."

a. Weeds. Creation was "subjected to futility" (Romans 8:20-22). Thorns and thistles, labor and sweat and pain have been added to make creation less cooperative with human rule. This not only applies in the field of agriculture, but also in other ways as we try to utilize the earth's resources and develop them for God.

b. Warfare. Human sin has alienated people and leads to fighting. Energy and resources that could be used for God's purposes are diverted to killing each other and taking each other's stuff. This will continue until the right King comes and makes war unnecessary. People will "beat their swords into plows" (Isaiah 2:4).

c. Wickedness. Sinful people do on purpose the things that God has forbidden and that work against the development of creation. All kinds of evil behavior flow from sinful hearts. We know that "the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Human history has shown this to be true on earth. The eternal phase of God's Kingdom will also demonstrate this truth.

3. Leadership Responsibilities Anyway

The story of the Bible is the story of God looking for a godly king to rule over his Kingdom. Various leadership titles have been used: patriarchs, prophets, priests, judges, kings, governors, emperors. God's first choice of a leadership model has been "king," though in our culture it is the model we understand least. In a kingdom, the king is responsible to protect and provide for his subjects, who are responsible to obey and serve him.

God wanted Israel to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" to effect his Kingdom over the whole world (Exodus 19:5-6). In one sense the nation of Israel became a miniature form of God's Kingdom. God promised Abraham that "kings would come from him" (Genesis 17:5-8). Moses wrote into the Torah guidelines for future kings (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) under God. When Israel approached their leader Samuel to demand a king (1 Samuel 8) the problem wasn't with a king *per se*, but with a king "like all the nations around us." Plus the problem of rejecting God's rule.

Unfortunately, his representatives couldn't even rule one nation. Even the best of judges and kings fell into sin and abused the people. In the days of Israel's kings, God sent his prophets ("every day" according to Jeremiah 7:25-26) to guide the kings in his ways. The good kings listened to the prophetic word and ruled better because of it; but most of the kings ignored God's word and failed to rule as God desired.

Eventually Israel lost the Kingdom, even over a small territory. Taken captive by foreign powers, Israel was no longer a realm or subjects or monarch. When they returned from Captivity, they had a people and a territory, but they didn't have the restoration of the king until the coming of Jesus.

4. Messiah as King of Kings

Since no human king has ruled with righteousness, God decided to become a man. He would be the righteous king promised to Adam, to Abraham, to Moses, to David.

The book of Daniel gives a series of dreams and visions about the coming of God's eternal king, the Son of Man. Daniel envisioned a series of Gentile empires who would have dominion over Israel (Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome). In the days of the Roman empire God would send from his sovereign throne the One who would destroy all other powers and rule over all creation. (See Daniel 2:31-45.)

When Jesus began his ministry, his message was, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). It had been over 600 years since Israel had a king. The purpose of his coming was to restore the kingdom. Gabriel predicted to Mary (Luke 1:26-33) that Jesus would reign on David's throne over the house of Israel in an unending kingdom. Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, praised God (Luke 1:67-79) for a successor to David, even though it wouldn't be John.

Jesus' teaching was heavy on preparing people for his eventual rule on earth. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) are all about the longing for God's reign. Many of

Jesus' parables begin with "The Kingdom of heaven is like . . ." [By the way, the terms "Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew and "Kingdom of God" in other Gospels are interchangeable. Some scholars have suggested that they are different concepts, but they are synonymous.]

In Jesus' trials and death, his identity as King is the main focus. The accusation fastened to his cross was "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." The Sanhedrin brought him to Pilate with their condemnation: "he claims to be Messiah, a king." Pilate questioned him at length on his kingdom and claim to be a king.

The Kingdom of God under Jesus' dominion would not be limited to the people of Israel. It would extend to all peoples, as God intended. Isaiah 49:6 declares, "It is too small a thing that you would restore Israel. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

In the Lord's Prayer, we pray for God's Kingdom to come. At some future time, it will. In the meantime, the Kingdom of God has already begun through the gospel. Whenever a person believes in Jesus, he or she submits individually to the reign of Christ. By the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we become subjects of the King. As we grow in our discipleship, we become part of God's kingdom on earth. Some of the evidence of this are (1) the spread of the kingdom through evangelism, (2) the spread of God's dominion of the earth through so-called secular work, (3) our use of kingdom resources now in ways that make eternal differences, and (4) the development of creation through imaginative, artistic, economic & political, and relational investments and discoveries.

5. Everlasting Reign

Jesus as the literal King of a universal kingdom will fulfill the promises. Of his kingdom there will be no end. But the Bible indicates two separate phases of this eternal kingdom.

a. First, at the end of human history as we know it, Jesus' kingdom will thrive on the cursed earth. Revelation 20:4-6 indicates that this kingdom will last for 1,000 years--the millennium. Conditions will be similar to how all of history has been. Nature will not be cooperative with human effort because of the curse. Sin will still be present. Animal behavior will not yet be changed to lions and lambs living together. Jesus will be King and the saints will reign with him. There will not yet be a new heaven or new earth. But Jesus will rule in righteousness.

This millennial kingdom will prove that righteous rule is possible, even over sinful people on a cursed earth. It will demonstrate that God was proper to demand and expect it of leaders throughout history.

b. Finally, after the 1,000 years and a brief rebellion against Jesus (as described in Revelation 20:7-10), the old earth and heaven will pass away. God will make everything new, including a new heaven and new earth. Revelation 21:1-8 promises that there will be no more pain, death, curse, crying, sin, or sinners. The Kingdom of God will continue forever. We who are part of his kingdom already will

continue to reign with him. We will be able to continue the ongoing development and dominion of the new creation under the righteous rule of our King Jesus. We will not need to deal with any sin or its effects.

B. Scriptures for further study in tracing the story through the Bible

1. The King God Chooses

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 gives guidelines for the kind of king God will choose to reign over his people. It also instructs the king so his kingdom can be different from the kingdoms of corrupt kings in neighboring countries.

2. God's Covenant with David

In 2 Samuel 7:1-17 Nathan the prophet told David that his dynasty would be without end. "Your throne will be established forever." God promised to discipline David's descendants when they needed it, but would never stop loving them.

3. He who rules over men

In the last words of David, he left a legacy of hope by the power of the Spirit. When kings rule over men in righteousness and in the fear of God, it refreshes the kingdom (2 Sam 23:1-7).

4. Psalms for the Coming King

Psalms 2, 21, 45, 110, and others anticipate the coming of God's chosen king, the Messiah. They celebrate the righteousness and power with which he will rule over Israel and the world. They warn those who would resist his authority. The New Testament quotes from these Psalms to describe King Jesus.

5. The Son of Man

Daniel 7:9-14 is Daniel's vision of the Messiah, under Jesus' favorite title for himself: The Son of Man. The Ancient of Days enthrones Messiah in an everlasting dominion to rule over the entire world.

6. Announcement to Mary

The angel Gabriel told Mary about the son she was to bear in Luke 1:25-33. He would have David's throne to rule over Israel forever. He would be great and be called the Son of the Most High.

7. Old Testament and New Testament

Jesus clearly connected the two testaments by claiming to fulfill the prophecies of old. But he also made a separation between them in talking about John the Baptist in Matthew 11:2-15. John was greater than any ordinary human, and the greatest and last of the Old Testament prophets. From John onward we are in the era of the Kingdom of heaven.

8. Kingdom Parables

Matthew 13:1-52 records many of Jesus' stories that reveal the character of his future reign. Luke 13:22-30 reminds us that God's kingdom is open to those who believe. No one should presume their right to it.

9. Using Kingdom Resources Now

Jesus' parable of the minas in Luke 19:11-27 tells us how to invest kingdom resources in this age in ways that will benefit others and ourselves in eternity. We are already in God's Kingdom in some ways, but await Christ's return for the rest of the Kingdom blessings.

10. The Appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ

Paul points us to the fulfillment of God's Kingdom at the return of Jesus. 1 Timothy 6:13-16 reminds us that he is the only Ruler, King of kings and Lord of lords. Those titles also appear in Revelation 1:5; 17:14; and 19:16.

11. The Seventh Trumpet

Revelation 11:15-19 describes John's vision of the last of seven trumpets, whose soundings trigger eschatological events. "The kingdom of the world has become Kingdom of Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever." Some scholars believe this trumpet is the one mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

12. The Thousand Years

We read about the first thousand years of Christ's reign in Revelation 20:1-6. It occurs between the first and second resurrections when Satan is bound. Those who were beheaded for Christ will reign with him. The Millennial phase of the Kingdom is prior to the new heaven and new earth in chapter 21.

C. Discussion Questions:

1. Most of us were raised in a democratic society with equality for all; God's Kingdom is a monarchy with clear lines of submission. How might our culture prevent us from understanding the present or the future aspects of the Kingdom? How can we adjust our thinking to be true subjects of the King, instead of assuming we can outvote Him? How can our church give more allegiance to our King in decisions we make for ministry?

2. Memorize Matthew 6:33. Reflect on areas of your life where you might actually be seeking something else more than the Kingdom and Righteousness of God. What can we do to help each other put higher priority on the King himself?

3. Consider the "dominion" aspect of God's Kingdom. Where in creation today do you see an undeveloped potential? Where do you see abuse of human dominion over creation, where man has caused more problems instead of solving problems? Where would you like to see more effectiveness, more beauty, more dignity, more creativity (in food production, energy, government, ecology, economics, godly character, righteousness undergirding laws, etc.)?

4. What Biblical leader (other than Jesus himself) impresses you as the most godly Kingdom leader? What about him made him a better model to follow than others? Underline or highlight the Kingdom story in purple.