

The Nature of the Kingdom in Both Testaments

Opening Argument

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The Old Testament is filled with hundreds and hundreds of verses describing the coming earthly kingdom of the Messiah. That kingdom will be built upon the Abrahamic covenant first mentioned in Genesis 12:1-3. God prophesied to give to Abraham and his seed (1) a land, (2) make of him a great seed, (3) and through him, all families of the earth would be blessed at some future point by the Lord. But how the nations would be blessed is barely mentioned in the Old Testament. By an unfolding plan, and by **progressive revelation**, we can now see how that played out.

Coming into the prophetic mix is the fact that Solomon, the son of David, would have coming forth from him a nation: “He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:13). Notice three key words: **House, throne, kingdom**.

House implies regency, the royal lineage, the dynasty.

Throne always pictures the “right to rule, the kingly authority.”

Kingdom, in the Old Testament context, always implies, when speaking of an earthly entity (which it usually is), a land and a people. We all know that God has a cosmic kingdom whereby He rules the universe, but that is not in view here.

While it is true that the “strangers” in the land, the Gentiles who worshipped Jehovah, could in time be incorporated into the Jewish nation, the above promises were given exclusively to Israel.

This promise of a “House, Throne, and Kingdom” is expanded on, and further revealed by “progressive revelation” to the nation of Israel. When that kingdom comes, i.e., the physical kingdom on earth, the Gentile nations, the geographic entities, will be blessed by the rule that goes forth from Jerusalem with the Messiah.

The prophecies are clear on this:

I [will] bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. ... I [will] gather them again to their own land; and will leave none of them there any longer (Ezek. 39:27-28).

The remnant of My people (Israel) will plunder [the nations], and the remainder of My nation will inherit them [the nations]; ... they have taunted and become arrogant against the people [the Jews] of the Lord of host. The Lord will be terrifying to them [the nations], ... and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to [the Lord], everyone from his own place [the nations] (Zeph. 2:9-11).

When that kingdom comes: **The King of Israel is in your midst; You will fear disaster no**

more. In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: “Do not be afraid, O Zion; ... I will gather you together; indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples [nations] of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes (Zeph. 3:15-20).

My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning (v. 8). This takes place just before the Messiah comes to reign.

I will shake all the nations, and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house [the restored temple] with glory, ... The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts, and in this place [the restored temple] I shall give peace, declares the Lord of host (Haggai 2:7-9).

It will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that which-ever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them (Zech. 14:16-17).

All the nations will call you [Israel—the Jewish people] blessed, for you shall be a delightful land, says the Lord of hosts (Mal. 3:12).

A biblical dispensationalist, using sound “normal hermeneutics,” that includes a simple understanding of CONTEXT, can see that these passages do not include a reference to the church during this kingdom period. The NATIONS are mentioned as geographical entities, though apparently it is clear that, during the kingdom, many Gentiles of these nations will lose their love of the Lord and in time will fail to trust Him. Their nations, with peoples and lands, can be judged if they do not do homage before the King Messiah! Many of the Gentiles so described will become believers in the Messiah, but these who believe are nowhere described as “the Church.”



The New Covenant. Warner and I agree that the New covenant is prophesied for Israel in the Old Testament (Jer. 31-34). God says that when it falls upon Israel they will receive forgiveness of their iniquities (v. 34b). That only the Jewish people are in view here is clear, because in one verse down God makes it clear that “If this fixed order (of the moon and stars) departs from before Me, declares the Lord, **then the offspring of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever**” (v. 36).

Notice that this New Covenant **has to do with Israel, the “nation.” The Gentiles nor the church are mentioned here. At this stage, this is a JEWISH promise.**

The Holy Spirit is the dynamic of the New covenant:

I will ‘slosh’ clean water on you, and you will be clean; ... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, ... And you will live in the land that I gave to **your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God (Ezek. 36:25-28).**

While the Dry Bones of Ezekiel 37:3-14 at first sounds like a physical resurrection of the Jewish people so that they might come to the Holy Land, in order to live in the kingdom, the better

understanding is that it is a “spiritual resurrection” to new life provided by the Holy Spirit. Even non-dispensationalists like Ellicott write:

The vision is expressly explained to mean that the children OF ISRAEL in their SCATTERED and apparently hopeless condition, shall yet be BROUGHT TOGETHER AGAIN and RESTORED to NATIONAL LIFE. The vision is not all concerned with the future resurrection; and yet it may well be thought that the idea of this was familiar to the mind of the [Jewish] people, as otherwise the prophet would hardly have chosen such a simile.

Ezekiel adds, “I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you **on your own land**” (v. 14), and “**I will not hide My face from them [national Israel] any longer, for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the HOUSE OF ISRAEL**” (39:29).

The Jewish rabbis concur that this is restoration to the land under discussion because Ezekiel writes, “they went into exile among the nations,” they will be gathered again, and “**I will leave none of them [the Jewish people] THERE [among the Gentile nations] any longer**” (v. 28).

NOTICE HOW JEWISH ALL OF THIS IS:

**Nation
Your own land
Out of “the nations”
None of them there “any longer”
House of Israel
Your forefathers**

But what about the New covenant?

The New covenant was made **first** for the Jewish people. Because of Genesis 12:3 (“through you [Abram] all families of the earth will be blessed”), there is a spillover of this part of the covenant to Gentiles.

The New covenant was ratified by Christ’s death. “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). The New covenant was **launched, started, begun** at Pentecost, but not **fulfilled. It is still with us today, and it will go on into the kingdom to bless the nation of Israel when the nation begins to accept their Messiah. For now, “ALL FAMILIES OF THE EARTH” are being blessed, though the idea of the universal church (Jew and Gentile in the same body), but this was not prophesied anywhere in the Old Testament! By Christ’s death, the covenant is ratified. It provides three main things:**

1. **Forgiveness of sins;**
2. **The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit,**
3. **It contrasts the Mosaic Law.**

Forgiveness:

I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more – Jer. 31:34.
As SERVANTS (diakonou) of the New covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), we then have this
MINISTRY (diakonos), as we received MERCY – 2 Cor. 4:1.

Indwelling of the Holy Spirit:

I will put My Spirit within you – Ezek. 37:14.
I will “slosh” clean water on you ... I will put My Spirit within you – Ezek. 36:25, 27.
Unless one is born of water EVEN the Spirit, he cannot see the KINGDOM of God – John
3:5.

Contrasts the Mosaic Law:

[The New covenant] is not like the [Mosaic] covenant which I made with their fathers
when I took them out of Egypt, which [covenant] they broke – Jer.31:32.
The Law of Moses kills, the New covenant by the Spirit gives life – 2 Cor.3:6.

The CHURCH then is blessed by, and benefited by, the New covenant at this present time. The CHURCH IS NOT the New covenant, but it is a “new man,” a unique body for this dispensation. It may be properly said that the church lies on top of the New covenant. When the Church is mentioned in the letters of Paul, it is mostly in reference to spiritual blessings, salvation, being a heavenly people, and receiving salvation through Christ.

The CHURCH is not about the Land blessings that the nation of Israel will someday enjoy. HOWEVER, Church saints will be in the kingdom; biblical dispensationalists have never denied this fact. But the Church is not the central kingdom people. Regenerated Israel has the promise of a re-gathering, reigning in the land, and their Messiah ruling as king over them.

The Church: Inheritance and the Kingdom

What do the epistles say about the Church, inheritance issues, and the kingdom?

The book of Acts has only seven references to the kingdom of God. None of them would give the impression that the church is now the kingdom. Some of these references simply reinforce the truth that there is a kingdom coming someday. But the slight references here do not give the impression that the church is in it now.

If Acts covers about 30 years in the founding period of the church age, seven mentions of the kingdom are slight indeed!

Acts 1:3. Jesus taught His disciples about the kingdom, but there is no implication that He is telling them the church IS the kingdom. The kingdom is JEWISH and it only stands to reason that He would explain to them the fact that it has for now been postponed.

Acts 1:6. When the disciples asked Jesus “are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time,” their question makes it clear that the church will not be the kingdom. The idea of “restoration” is

the key here. Too, Jesus' answer would certainly imply a postponement, or the fact that something at that time would be replacing the kingdom.

Jesus answered: "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (v. 7). This is certainly a "side-tracking" response that would make all hearers and readers believe He was speaking of a postponement of the kingdom.

Non-dispensationalist Ellicott says on this verse: "That the Kingdom was at some time to be restored to Israel, was plain."

Acts 8:12. Philip went to the city of Samaria to preach. This was the area of the mixture of Assyrians and Jews who had mixed together centuries before. Interestingly, by the grammar, Luke separates the:

"preaching of the kingdom of God" FROM
"the name of Jesus Christ." The great Greek grammarian J. A. Alexander notes that these were two distinct subjects!

Acts 14:22. In the city of Lystra, Paul almost lost his life. He was stoned and left for dead (v. 19). This persecution is what the disciples were referring to when they said, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Again, it is clear they are not referring to the church. They were already IN THE CHURCH! The Greek text reads, "It is necessary (dei) for us 'by means of ' (dia) many tribulations to go into the kingdom of God." "Tribulations" are the hallmark sign of what the church must go through in this dispensation. The "tribulations" are certainly not THE Tribulation that is a distinct eschatological period in the future. Personal persecutions when Paul wrote were in view.

Acts 19:8. Having entered a Jewish synagogue, the apostle Paul "reasoned and persuaded the Jews about the kingdom of God." What would that message of the kingdom have been about? It is not impossible that it would have been about the fact that the kingdom was postponed, as Christ had alluded in 1:6-7.

Acts 20:25. At Ephesus, Paul preached the kingdom of God, but again, few would suggest he was saying that the church at that time was that kingdom. In most of these references to the kingdom in Acts, we are impressed with what little information was given about the kingdom. The only hint of what Paul and others said must go back to 1:6-7 where Christ hints the kingdom is postponed.

Acts 28:23, 31. Again, Paul is explaining to the Jewish elders in Rome the issues of the postponement of the kingdom. His "second" subject he spoke with them about was "concerning Jesus." More than likely this is about the death and resurrection of the Messiah and certainly the fact that Jesus was the One! Now, the issue is His substitutionary death for sinners. Only some Jewish leaders were persuaded (v. 24), and Paul pronounces a curse on them for rejecting His work on the cross (vs. 26-27). Paul's conclusion was that this "salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen" (v. 28).

1 Cor. 15:24. Here Paul makes it clear that the kingdom of God is yet future.

1 Cor. 15:50. Here Paul says "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." What does he mean? We believe that physical Jews will enter the kingdom following the tribulation. Is

there a contradiction in this passage? No. Paul is referring here to the destiny of the church after it returns to earth for the kingdom. The church is in view. Paul speaks of the present saints, including himself and addresses the issue of those “in Christ” (v. 22), “who are Christ’s at His Coming” [the rapture] (v. 23). THE JEWS WHO WILL BE WITH HIM IN THE KINGDOM ARE NEVER DESCRIBED “AS THOSE IN CHRIST.”

Paul in this chapter 15 speaks of the “imperishable,” “raised in glory,” “a spiritual body,” “those who are heavenly,” “immortal,” “the changed.” Thus, here in this context, the “flesh and blood” that will not inherit the kingdom has to do with those in this church age who have not been redeemed. And indeed, all in this dispensation of the church will enter the future Messianic kingdom in the new resurrected and glorified bodies, not in human flesh, as many of the remnant of Jews who trust their Messiah, and go from the horrors of the tribulation into the kingdom blessings, when He returns!

The apostle Paul mentions the kingdom of God when he speaks of its moral and spiritual purity (Rom. 14:17; I Cor. 4:20; 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). Right now, presently, the church has “been qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” by the Father (Col. 1:12), because the Father has “transferred” (Aorist Tense) (“*mathistami*,” “made [us] stand with”) in the kingdom of His beloved Son TO WHOM WE HAVE REDEMPTION, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS” (vs. 13-14).

The church is seen now as standing with Christ in His kingdom. Paul is “projecting this concept into the future. Notice carefully how Paul goes on and focuses on the issue of salvation for the church, made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. It is clear (even amils agree) we are not now historically existing in the earthly Messianic kingdom, though we are seen there in that realm in an anticipatory sense.

Notice also believers in Christ were “rescued” (*ruomai*, Aorist Tense) FROM, OUT OF (*ek*) the “domain” of darkness.” DOMAIN is *exousia* that many commentators translate as almost equal in meaning to “kingdom.” Were we living in an actual historical “domain of darkness”? Yes, in a real spiritual sense (not SPIRITUALIZED sense). Thus, Paul is balancing an equal transfer: The spiritual evil domain to the spiritual kingdom of God’s dear Son! (Be careful: This is not amillennialism!)

However, there is another thought about this passage: This “kingdom” of God’s dear Son may be the only reference to the church being a “kingdom” but certainly not the Jewish Millennial reign of the Son of David, the Son of Man. The reference to Son of Man is distinctly Messianic and never used in describing the relationship of the church to Christ. But Paul says here “the Son of God,” which could be applied to the church in an extremely broad manner.

The church does have a spiritual inheritance in the kingdom, not with land promises, not as a theocratic nation, not as an earthly people like the Jews. We will however be in the kingdom! Other references to the kingdom of God:

We are to walk worthy of His kingdom (2 Thess. 1:5).

Timothy was charged “by His kingdom” to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

The poor are heirs to the kingdom (James 2:5).

Almost everyone admits, by the way, that the references to “the heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18), and the “eternal kingdom” (2 Pet. 1:11) has to do with heaven itself, and are not statements of “replacement” for the MESSIANIC KINGDOM. Again, it cannot be stressed enough when interpreting a passage that CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT, is the order of the day.

The Kingdom in Revelation

The expression “kingdom” in Revelation needs to be addressed: John the apostle says that believers have been “released from sins by His blood” and “He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (1:5-6). “Kingdom” is indefinite (no article) and it is proper to have a coma following. Christ has made the church **a kingdom, priests to His God ...** This priesthood of the believers is like a kingdom but it is not **THE Messianic earthly kingdom rule of the Son of David from the capitol of Jerusalem!**

If Revelation 5:10 is describing the raptured saints in heaven who have arrived just before the tribulation begins in chapter 6, then we are reminded that church saints were MADE (Aorist Tense) a kingdom and priesthood, and that “they will in the future reign upon the earth.” The church will participate in the kingdom and have important functions, but nowhere is the church seen as the dominant people. When verses like 5:10 are mentioned, there are no details as to how extensive or deep the involvement will be of the church in the kingdom. The feeling is that the role is limited.

For the Jews in the kingdom, there will be a restored priesthood (of the house of Zadok), with sacrifices, and with a restored temple (Ezek. 40-48). These facts have always been accepted by biblical dispensationalists who simply go where the Bible goes. But the Word of God does not go to the point of saying the church IS the kingdom, or that the church is the prominent people of that period. The kingdom will be inhabited by God’s earthly people Israel. And all of the Jews (and Gentiles) who enter with their natural bodies out of the tribulation will be blessed in the earthly kingdom. Israel will have her land, the city of Jerusalem, and her King. She is always pictured in the OT prophecies as the core, the central people in the millennium.

Revelation 1:9 is often misread. John the apostle claims he was “together fellowshiping” at that present time (when he was writing) in the TRIBULATION, the KINGDOM (he just described in verse 6), and PERSEVERANCE (“*upomone*,” under it alone). These are parallels and are not projected into the future. These nouns describe the church, its troubles, and its role (as a kingdom), and the spiritual struggles of John and the churches at that time.

Revelation 11:15 is a prophecy given in the CONTEXT of the middle of the tribulation as it rages in John’s book. It is a preview statement of the coming kingdom reign of Christ. The future tense of “He will reign” governs the statement “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.” It is an anticipatory and “projected” statement of what is coming toward the end of the book—the coming of the Messiah!

The King arriving is clearly in view in 19:11-21. That His reign is in view in 20:1-6, almost no one disputes, not even amillennialists, though the word “kingdom” is not mentioned. “Christ reigning” is mentioned throughout the CONTEXT of this passage in chapter 19.

Conclusion

In the whole there are only a few verses that mention the kingdom in the New Testament epistles, and those that do are but statements that are generally given in passing within the context of other issues. This is not meant to downplay the idea of the kingdom. (In fact, it is biblical dispensationalists who teach more about the kingdom than anyone else.) But the majority of teaching about the prophesied glorious Messianic reign of our Savior has already been fully expounded by the prophets in the Old Testament. In those great and touching kingdom passages, Israel as a restored and redeemed nation stands out with hundreds of descriptions and promises.

The church is not depicted as the “land” people of the kingdom. This is reserved for restored Israel. The church today is made up of Jew and Gentile. The “blessings” of the Abrahamic covenant come to the church through the instrument of the New covenant—this no one doubts. But this does not then tie the Gentiles all the way back through the Old Testament as being part of the all-encompassing Abrahamic covenant.

Even to be called the “sons of Abraham” does not mandate to us the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant. Where the Abrahamic covenant is specifically mentioned in Galatians, Paul stays focused on the issues of salvation and spiritual blessings—not the promise of the earthly land, or the glorious season of Christ’s kingly reign. Paul writes:

Those who are of faith are sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:7).

God would justify the Gentiles by faith (v. 8).

Those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham the believer (v. 9).

In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that **We (Jew and Gentile)** would receive **the land promises? NO! “So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit (the New covenant) THROUGH FAITH!”** (v. 14).

When Paul then goes on in Galatians and presents what the church is supposed to now receive, he focuses on the subject of “imparted life” (v. 21), and justification (v. 24). He does not put the church under the whole Abrahamic covenant, only those aspects that have to do with spiritual issues and blessings (the New covenant). He makes no mention of geography or the land promises. Notice how Paul puts it:

Sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (v. 26).

All baptized INTO Christ (v. 27). [Not said of kingdom redeemed Israel!]

Clothed with Christ (v. 27). [Not said of kingdom redeemed Israel!]

Belong to Christ, Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise [in regard to these spiritual blessings he’s discussing IN CONTEXT!] (v. 29). [Not referring to land issues!]

Paul adds, “We through the Spirit (**and His work of applying the New covenant to saving us**) by faith, **ARE WAITING FOR THE HOPE OF [FINAL] RIGHTEOUSNESS (OUR FINAL HEAVENLY REDEMPTION)** (5:5).

On this verse the great Ellicott writes, “This ideal or potential righteousness becomes real and actual only at the end of the Christian’s [life].”

Summary: Saints of all generations are saved by the death of Christ on the cross. However, at this present time, the church stands out as a unique organism, those “in Christ,” of Jew and Gentile. There is now no historic, earthly, geographical kingdom on earth, with a central city (such as restored Jerusalem), and a worldwide governmental rule, such as the Messiah will execute in actuality, from an specific place, i.e., the Holy land.

The New covenant, already in place and now blessing the church, will be the dynamic of the kingdom. By the Spirit’s power, the Jews will be spiritually restored, recognizing Jesus as their Savior and King. Many Gentiles, who are part of the nations who survived the tribulation, will also put their trust in Him during that period and will be saved. They will be the Gentiles “redeemed,” living in their own lands. In that broad sense they will be a part of the kingdom. The resurrected church saints, in their new bodies, will be there in the kingdom to enjoy the Savior’s reign. In that limited and relatively undefined sense, the church will be a part of the kingdom. But there are no verses of Scripture that would call for a permanent and specific rule for the church.

It is not my opinion that we who now know Christ will feel slighted in the kingdom. We will be there in our resurrected bodies enjoying and fellowshiping with the Lord, and with other resurrected believers of other ages past.

While it is clear all who will be in the kingdom, those in their natural bodies, and those in their resurrected bodies, were all saved by the precious blood of Christ. But the technical concepts of the church described as, “the body of Christ,” “in Christ” are not part of the description of the kingdom saints. The church dispensation is a unique period in history. And the understanding of what the church now is, is quickly being lost. The next event for the church is the rapture!

Thanks for reading!

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