

A Kingdom on Earth

GOD is all-powerful, He is everywhere, and He lives for ever. If God has a kingdom, then we should expect it to have similar characteristics. Nothing should be able to resist it, be outside it, or ever take its place. If that were true now, the Gospel of the kingdom would be simple. We would all be part of it and we should never want anything else. But it is not true. In heaven all is well; but on earth, where there is so much wrong, God's authority is obviously not being observed.

An Imperfect World

This is what lies behind a request in the Lord's Prayer:

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

Sincere Christians want the kingdom to be a reality on earth. That is why there is a Gospel of the kingdom. Something needs preaching, and something needs doing, before the kingdom of God is firmly established on the earth. Sadly, none of us finds it natural to obey God. Of course God is all-powerful. He can make nations obey Him, and He can punish them when they do not. He arranges the course of history.

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men (Daniel 4:17).

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel—thus you shall say to your masters: 'I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me' (Jeremiah 27:4–5).



No one, in the long run, can resist God's will. Yet God will not turn our free will into something mechanical. If we are sinful, He can punish us, but He will not make us righteous unless we are willing.

Kingdom in the Past

If we look for the kingdom of God on the earth up to now, we can look for two things. We may find people who want to obey God, and who truly honour Him as their King. Or we may find God exercising His authority over some nation. We find both.

Some people stand up for obedience to God, for example Abel and Noah (Genesis chapters 4 and 6). God also chose a man of obedient heart to leave his people and go where God led him – Abraham (Genesis 12.1). God then gave Abraham’s descendants (the Jewish nation) a promise:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5–6).

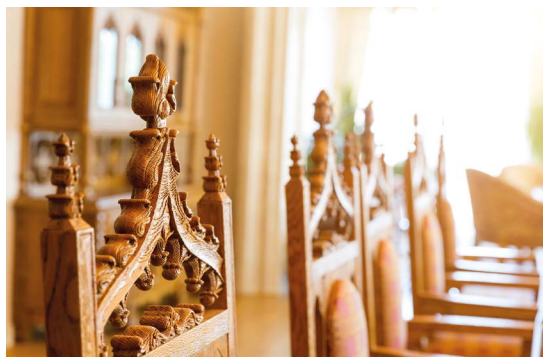
Here the word ‘kingdom’ is used about God’s people for the first time, before they had any human king. God’s kingdom promise was conditional on their obedience and they were not very obedient, in spite of their promise (Exodus 19:8). But God kept His agreement with them, even when they broke theirs with Him, and, when they asked for a human king, He allowed this too (1 Samuel 8:4-9). Later, King David was much more than the second king of the kingdom of God. One day there was to come from his royal line a King who would reign for ever.

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7: 12–16).

David’s son, Solomon, was the next king of Israel, and he is described as ruling over God’s kingdom, for example:

Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him (1 Chronicles 29:23).

Meanwhile this chosen race, selected to keep alive the knowledge of God, continued its miserable course of disobedience. The larger part of the kingdom soon split away from the house of David. It



was ingloriously dispossessed from the land in 722 BC because of its relentless wickedness (2 Kings 17:9–18). The house of David was not much better. There were a few righteous kings, but also wicked and weak ones, under whom idolatry and corruption flared up. Finally, in 586 BC, this kingdom went the same way as the other (2 Chronicles 36:14–21). About 800 years after God’s kingdom promise to Israel, there was nothing much left but hope of a special righteous king (Ezekiel 21:26–7). This promise had been given to David, and repeated by the prophets.



But, for nearly 600 years the only hope of its fulfilment rested in a scattered people who, wonderfully, survived their exile. They returned under Cyrus, thrived, but then fell under the sway of the Romans.

The King

They were there when Mary travelled to Bethlehem and gave birth to the Messiah, the Son of God. The Jews, knowing their prophets' words, were expecting their promised King. They knew that he should be born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:4–7; Micah 5:2), and the angel's words to Mary were just what they expected of their Messiah: their Christ, their anointed king of an everlasting kingdom (Luke 1:30–33).

They watched him eagerly as he preached the Gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). When they saw how he could miraculously provide food for them, they tried to make him a king by force (John 6:15). They even publicly proclaimed him as the promised Christ (Mark 11: 9–10). But this was not what happened. Jesus gave no

encouragement to their enthusiasm, and when the rulers condemned him, the public praise was quickly turned into a cry for his crucifixion (Mark 15: 11–14). His last public recognition was written on his cross: 'King of the Jews' (Mark 15:25–26). Although Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples who asked him whether they might now expect the kingdom to be established were given no encouragement (Acts 1: 6–7).

A Future Hope

There was to be no re-establishment of the throne of David just then, and there has not been for 2000 years afterwards. All the prophecies about that time of glory remain unfulfilled, and yet Jesus said that he believed them (Luke 24:25–27, 44). His followers went on preaching the Gospel of the kingdom after he ascended into heaven (e.g. Acts 8:12, 28:23–31; James 2:5).

God's kingdom is at the core of the Gospel and it is our choice right now whether we are to be part of it.

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