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The Everlasting Kingdom

The Kingdom of God in Scripture and in Our Lives



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Chapter 1

THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF A KING AND A KINGDOM

Kings are scarce nowadays. The terms *king* and *kingdom*, so familiar in scripture, sound peculiar in the context of ordinary life. We chat about kings in Bible classes, but do we really grasp what it was like to live under one? Do we understand the awesomeness of the phrase “*King of kings*”? If we cannot grasp the power and fame of an earthly king, how well can we appreciate the surpassing glory of our heavenly King?

What we hope to do in this 13-week study is help close a gap in our understanding of scripture. From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible speaks of kings and kingdoms, yet most modern Christians are poorly equipped to understand. Christians in America, for example, have a concrete notion of a president, Congress, and Supreme Court, but a rather hazy one of a king. When they acknowledge Jesus as King or talk about the kingdom of heaven, they have no experience to flesh out the concepts of “king” and “kingdom.” Christians in England do have a monarch but are governed mainly by their Parliament and prime minister. They understand kingship better than Americans but not so well as their seventeenth-century ancestors who fought for or against the so-called “divine right of kings.”

And so it goes in nation after nation. Over the past 200 years, both individualism (America, Australia, Canada) and collectivism (U.S.S.R., China) have meant weakening or abolishing kingship. Except in a very few countries, modern Christians

have no experience to make the *idea* of kingship vivid. Moreover, the knowledge they do have may or may not apply to kingship and kingdoms of biblical times.

Fortunately, there are ways to improve our understanding of kingship. When we do so, we also improve our understanding of scripture, because the story of God's chosen people is so often bound up in the rise or fall of kings.

A better understanding may even improve our worship. Scripture teaches that God is the Father, Good Shepherd, Master, and King. It is easy for us to understand being sons and daughters, and somewhat harder to see ourselves as sheep and as servants. What's hardest is to see ourselves as subjects of a king. But this is what we undertake in our study, gradually stretching our twentieth-century minds and emotions. The reward is rich — to glimpse through scripture the grandeur, the sovereignty, and the beauty of the kingdom of God, and the joy of its citizens.

The study of the idea of kingdom in the Old Testament will lay a foundation for our examination of further expressions of God's kingdom. The definition of the word *kingdom* in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages provides a basic insight with which to begin.

Definition

What is the “kingdom of God”? The *basic meaning* of “kingdom” in biblical language is “kingship, kingly leadership, rule or reign, an exercise of power.” When we today use the word “kingdom,” we think of a territory, a realm. Not so people in biblical times. They thought of the active, dynamic exercise of kingly power. To be a king was not an office but a function, not a title but a deed. The kingdom of God, therefore, refers to his sovereignty, the “rule of God” or the “reign of God.”

The spiritual meaning of kingdom finds an illustration from the political meaning. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and some parts in Aramaic, a language closely related to Hebrew. Kingdom in these languages meant political kingship, royal sovereignty. This secular sense of kingdom appears in several Old Testament passages. In 1 Samuel 20:31 king Saul said to his son Jonathan, “For as long as the son of Jesse [David] lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be

established." In other words, Jonathan would not be able to succeed to the kingship of his father. And, indeed, the kingly power passed from Saul to David. "These are the numbers of the divisions of the armed troops, who came to David in Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul over to him, according to the word of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 12:23). When the royal rule passed from David to his son Solomon, 1 Kings 2:12 says, "So Solomon sat upon the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was firmly established." The text is not talking about Solomon's territory but about his kingly authority being established.

The same usage occurs about kingdoms other than Israel's. Daniel spoke to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, "You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory . . ." (Daniel 2:37). Power, might, and glory explain kingdom and are virtually synonymous with it. All of the words refer to the king's majesty and rule. Similarly, when Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he said: "Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. . . . It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will" (Daniel 4:22, 24f.). When the predicted madness overtook Nebuchadnezzar, the voice from heaven spoke to him: "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you" (Daniel 4:31). Babylon as a realm was still there; what had been taken away was Nebuchadnezzar's ability to rule and so his royal leadership. When Nebuchadnezzar returned to sanity, he confessed, "At the same time my reason returned to me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me" (Daniel 4:36). Babylon itself was not re-established nor became more glorious, but Nebuchadnezzar himself was restored to the exercise of kingly power, with all the attendant honor and prestige. The secular sense of royalty applied to a

queen as well as to a king. Esther 1:19 describes the removal of Vashti from her position as wife of King Ahasuerus of Persia, and the Revised Standard Version translates, "And let the king give her royal position [literally kingdom, or here queenship] to another who is better than she." This is the thought in the words of Mordecai to Esther, "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). "Kingdom" is the same word rendered "royal position" in 1:19. Esther had replaced Vashti as queen and so had come to occupy a royal position.

Although the New Testament was written in a different language than the Old Testament was, the same basic meaning of "kingship" belongs to its usage of "kingdom." In the Greek of the New Testament, "kingdom" refers to the situation or being of a king, his dignity and power. Once more, there are political uses of the term which show the basic meaning. The political or secular use of the word "kingdom" in the New Testament occurs in the following examples. Jesus' "parable of the pounds" refers to "a nobleman [who] went into a far country to receive kingly power [kingdom] and then return. . . . When he returned, having received the kingly power [kingdom]" (Luke 19:12, 15). Jesus' parable alludes to the Roman practice of ruling non-Hellenized countries through "client kings," of whom Herod the Great was one. These native rulers were dependent upon Rome and received their authority from her. Revelation 17 offers other instances: "And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power [kingdom], but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour" (vs. 12); "for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power [kingdom] to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth" (vss. 17f.).

Derived from this primary meaning of "reign" was the *secondary sense* of a "realm," as in our ordinary English usage today. Representatives of this secondary meaning in the Bible are fewer and often less certain. From the Old Testament there may be cited Esther 3:6, "Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the

people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus." The meaning is "realm," and that is the translation adopted by the Revised Standard Version for the same word in Daniel 9:1, "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans," and in Daniel 11:9, "Then the [king of the north] shall come into the realm of the king of the south but shall return into his own land." From the New Testament a clear example is Mark 6:23, where Herod Antipas promised to the daughter of Herodias, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." Other fairly certain examples of the meaning "realm" occur in Matthew 4:8f., when the tempter showed Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" and promised them to him if he would worship him, and in Matthew 12:25, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand." All of these passages pertain to the political realm, but these are by no means all of the instances of this derived meaning. Yet it should be emphasized again that this is a secondary meaning, and the instances of it are much less frequent than those of the primary meaning.

God Is King

The phrase "kingdom of God" refers to God as king, to his kingship, not to the realm over which he rules. Although the exact phrase "kingdom of God" does not occur in the Old Testament, the idea is found there frequently. The Bible declares that *God is always king*.

Many passages use the designation *King* about God. This may perhaps have been an adoption of the political terminology in order to express a truth about the nature and position of God. As a name or description of God, "King" says that he reigns. And the Bible presents God as reigning over all and as reigning forever. In Isaiah's call to become a prophet he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple"; and Isaiah confessed, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord

of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:1, 5). Israel at its deliverance from the Egyptians at the Red Sea sang, "The Lord will reign for ever and ever" (Exodus 15:18). David addressed God in prayer with these words, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all" (1 Chronicles 29:11). That verse is an impressive combination of royal terms ascribed to God, but the thought is not exceptional in the Old Testament. Even the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar is quoted as saying about God, "How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation" (Daniel 4:3 and note also 4:34).

The Psalms very often address God as king, as for instance Psalms 5:2, "Hearken to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to thee do I pray." Some other passages from the Psalms are the following:

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits enthroned as king for ever. (29:10)

Thou art my King and my God,
who ordainest victories for Jacob. (44:4)

Thy solemn processions are seen, O God,
the processions of my God, my King, into the
sanctuary. (68:24)

Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at thy altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God. (84:3)

Particularly impressive about the nature of God and the meaning of the word kingdom is Psalms 145. The Psalm begins, "I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever" (vs. 1). Then especially notable are verses 10-13:

All thy works shall give thanks to thee, O Lord,
and all thy saints shall bless thee!

They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom,
and tell of thy power,
to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of thy kingdom.

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and thy dominion endures throughout all generations.

Hebrew poetry makes use of parallelism. The same idea is expressed in different words set in parallel statements. This feature of Hebrew poetry helps to make clear the meaning of words. We can tell the meaning of words by the company they keep. Even as one can tell something about the character and interests of a person by the company he keeps, so one can tell something about the meaning of a word by the words associated with it and used with it. This passage from Psalms 145 associates kingdom with glory and splendor; and it uses in synonymous parallelism with kingdom the words *power*, *mighty deeds*, and *dominion*. This passage brings out the active, dynamic quality of the word "kingdom," a sense appropriate for the Biblical view of God. He does not merely sit on a throne, but he reigns by performing mighty deeds. His rule is not static but is expressed in acts of power. This royal quality of God is said to be everlasting. God is and always has been King. God, therefore, has always had a kingdom.

This same declaration about the kingship of God is found also in the New Testament. Note the impressive doxology of 1 Timothy 1:17, "To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

The Old Testament specifies that God is *King over the whole world*. Drawing on the Psalms once more, we read in Psalms 103:19, "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." Again, "For the Lord, the Most High, is terrible, a great king over all the earth. . . . For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne" (Psalms 47:2, 7f.).

The last quotation introduces a further specification of God's kingship. His kingship over the universe means that he is *King over all nations*. The peoples of the earth may not recognize it,

but God is the real ruler and king. "For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations" (Psalms 22:28). Or again,

The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble;
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth quake!
The Lord is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the peoples.

. . . .
Mighty King, lover of justice,
thou hast established equity;
thou hast executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob. (Psalms 99:1-4)

Jeremiah calls God "King of the nations": "Who would not fear thee, O King of the nations? For this is thy due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like thee. . . . But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation" (Jeremiah 10:7, 10).

God is further, and more particularly, King over his people. He is *King over Israel*. He declared, "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King" (Isaiah 43:15). And again, "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god'" (Isaiah 44:6). Isaiah 41:21 uses the title "King of Jacob" for God. God became king over Israel when the people accepted his covenant and law (Deuteronomy 33:5). God chose Israel as his people but did not force his covenant on them; they acknowledged God as their God and so he became their king and they his kingdom (Exodus 19:5-8).

Summary and Application

This study of the word *kingdom* in the Old Testament shows its primary meaning of kingship, royal rule. A reign creates a realm, and so there was a secondary meaning of a realm or a territory. The kingdom of God is the reign of God. God is always king. He rules the universe. He rules the nations. He rules his people. They become God's kingdom in the derived sense.

An application of the principles proclaimed in the Old Testament is in order. If God is King, what does that mean for me? God's government is not a democracy. If God is King, then his government is a monarchy. Majority rule does not determine right and wrong. God as King sets the standards and determines the principles and regulations. In human political affairs democracy may be the best form of government. Where imperfect human beings are concerned, even the best form of government is far from ideal. Winston Churchill is quoted as saying, "Democracy is the worst possible form of government, except all the others that have been invented." Even if we do not agree with that pessimistic judgment on human governments, God's government is still vastly different. If there is a perfectly good, just, and loving ruler, monarchy becomes the best form of government. The governor of the universe is that kind of a ruler, and the government of the universe is a monarchy. The kingdom is God's, not man's.

The question then for each person is, Will I submit to his rule? Will I submit to Jesus Christ, the son of man, to whom God has given the dominion? Prentice Meador wrote a book on the parables of Jesus which he entitled *Who Rules Your Life?* That is the question which the theme of the kingdom of God should leave with each one. God is King in ultimate reality; but in actual fact in daily living, "Who rules my life?"

Chapter 1

Review Questions

1. Why is it difficult for people today to understand the the Biblical language of the kingdom?
2. What is the basic meaning of the word *kingdom* in the Biblical languages?
3. What are some Old Testament passages which exhibit this meaning of kingdom? How do they show this meaning?
4. What are some New Testament passages which exhibit this meaning of kingdom? How do they show this meaning?
5. How is the secondary sense of “realm” derived from the primary sense of “reign” or “kingship”? Cite some Biblical instances of this secondary meaning.
6. Cite some Biblical passages which affirm God is King.
7. Is God’s kingship everlasting?
8. What is meant by “parallelism” as a characteristic of Hebrew poetry? How does this help define the meaning of words?
9. Over what and whom does God exercise his kingship?
10. What is the practical application to me of the truth that God is King?

Chapter 2

PROPHETIC WORDS

God is King. Therefore, in Biblical language he always has a kingdom. He rules over the whole world and over all nations. Nevertheless, he chose one people, Israel, among whom he manifested his kingship in a special way. God's kingdom is heavenly and eternal; Israel was its earthly and temporal expression.

The Kingdom of Israel

The kingdom of God had its earthly, or human manifestation in Old Testament times in the *nation of Israel*.

The early feeling in Israel was that the nation should have no earthly king, because God was King. Gideon gave expression to this view, when there was an effort to make him king, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you" (Judges 8:23). God, however, finally acceded to the wishes of the people and allowed them to have a human king as his representative. The important narrative is in 1 Samuel 8. The elders of Israel came to Samuel and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us a king to govern us like the nations" (vs. 5). Although Samuel was displeased at the request, "The Lord said to Samuel, 'Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. . . . Now then, hearken to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them' " (vss. 7, 9). Samuel did so, "But the people refused to listen to the

voice of Samuel; and they said, 'No! but we will have a king over us' " (vs. 19). As a result, "The Lord said to Samuel, 'Hearken to their voice, and make them a king' " (vs. 22). Subsequently Saul was chosen as the first king over the nation of Israel and was anointed by Samuel. Later in his farewell address to the people Samuel recalled the appointment of a king still with a note of displeasure, "You said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the Lord your God was your king" (1 Samuel 12:12). Nonetheless God acknowledged and blessed the institution of the kingship in Israel and incorporated it into his plans.

In fact, God remained in control of the kingship of his people. He could pass on the kingship to anyone he chose. Thus David succeeded Saul rather than Saul's son Jonathan. Moreover, God promised to David that the kingship would remain in his family. One of the important promises of the Old Testament relates to the kingship; it is found in God's words through the prophet Nathan to David:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever. (2 Samuel 7:12-16) (There is a parallel account in 1 Chronicles 17:11-14.)

Note that it was the family and kingship of David which were promised to endure, not the political kingdom of Israel. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise will be developed later, but for now observe further that according to 2 Samuel 7:14 the descendants of David who succeeded him in the kingship were promised the relation of sonship to God. Accession to the kingship carried with it an official sonship: Such was the close, yet dependent, relationship of the King to God that at his coronation he was proclaimed an adopted "son of God." "I have set my king

on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you' " (Psalms 2:6f.). The language of sonship carried over in expectations for the future, "And I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth" (Psalms 89:27; cf. Isaiah 9:6f.). Even as the nation of Israel was described as God's son (Hosea 11:1), so the king as the representative and embodiment of the people was called God's son. This feature too enters into the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to David, for Jesus as son of David was also Son of God (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32f.).

The promise to David was described as a covenant and was renewed to his son Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:18). The relation of the earthly kingship to the heavenly kingship is brought out in the statement that Solomon was chosen to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel (1 Chronicles 28:5; cf. 29:23; 2 Chronicles 9:8). The kingdom remained the Lord's with an earthly viceregent. Rehoboam's son, Abijah, rebuked Jeroboam for his rebellion in thinking "to withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hand of the sons of David" (2 Chronicles 13:8; cf. vs.5)

The nation of Israel unfortunately was not faithful to the Lord, and the human kings did not exemplify the rule of God. Hence God held out a promise for a righteous ruler descended from David. "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 23:5). The "Branch" was to be a descendant of David, and in contrast to so many of his successors this king would rule wisely and justly. This future king would be triumphant and victorious, but also humble (Zechariah 9:9). Such promises point to a consideration of the Old Testament expectations about the future manifestations of the kingdom of God.

The Future Rule of God

In one sense, it is ironic that the Old Testament has so much to say about a *future realization* of God's kingdom. His people Israel, were told bluntly and often that God had reigned forever

and would reign forever. They, of all people on earth, should have acknowledged his kingship, but time and again they denied it by their actions. Thus the Old Testament has a looking forward to the time when God's people would acknowledge him as King in fact as well as in doctrine.

Some prophetic passages put God's rule in the future. *God will rule*. Not only was his kingship a present affirmation of the faith of Israel; it would become a decisive reality in the future. The realization or accomplishment of that rule was capable of various manifestations and various degrees of fulfillment. Some of the passages which speak of God's kingship as future are the following.

On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders he will manifest his glory.

(Isaiah 24:21-23)

The same declaration that "The Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and for evermore" occurs in Micah 4:7f. Obadiah 21 declares "And the kingdom shall be the Lord's." These passages put the reign of God in Jerusalem in the future. The next passage, although using the present tense, has a future context: "The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more" (Zephaniah 3:15). Another verse occurs in a section of prophecy rich in New Testament associations: "And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one" (Zechariah 14:9).

These passages about a future rule of God might seem contradictory to those affirming the present rule of God in Old Testament times and even more to his everlasting kingship. Actually the passages about the future rule of God are based

on his everlasting dominion. Because God always is King, he will act in the future in his royal capacity. Moreover, there is another factor to be put into the equation. That is the human factor of mankind's response to and relationship to God's rule. That human response is an important consideration in the fulfillment of God's rule over his creation. It will receive more attention in the further development of the Biblical teaching about God's kingdom.

The Old Testament passages about the future reign of God emphasize that God in his kingly capacity *acts for salvation*. God's reign is for the good of human beings. God exercises his kingly power for redemptive purposes. The sovereign God is a savior God. Isaiah 44:6 was quoted in the preceding lesson; it declared that the Lord is "the King of Israel and his Redeemer" and so linked together the ideas of God's power and redemption. It is especially Isaiah who picks up the theme of the saving power of God's kingly rule. "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us" (Isaiah 33:22). God as judge in this passage is seen as protecting the privileges of his people. He will act for deliverance from danger and for the safety of his people, as a good and just ruler would.

In a modern republic, we still long for wise and self-sacrificing rulers. Even in a representative democracy, we daydream about a George Washington, an Alfred the Great, or a Charlemagne returning to set everything right. In nineteenth-century England, this daydreaming became a national nostalgia for the Middle Ages. Sir Walter Scott's novels, Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King*, and Gothic architecture were popular because they helped Britons escape briefly to a simpler era. In a time before heavy industry, air pollution, poorhouses, and complicated international politics, a great ruler might arise and prevail, they thought. But the daydream always vanished, and no King Arthur remained to set the world right. A hundred years later, Americans showed the same longing when they nicknamed President Kennedy's administration "Camelot." They were only half-joking. Then Camelot was shattered by an assassin's bullet.

To that modern longing for the perfect king, there is no answer but the God of the Bible. Not only do we see perfect might and

wisdom in God's nature, we see it as he exercises his kingship through the various kings of Israel. Some passages speak of God ruling in the future not personally or directly but through *a human representative*. His rule will bring righteousness (Isaiah 11:1-5) and peace (Isaiah 9:5-6). The book of Daniel emphasizes the humanity of this king by calling him "son of man," although he is a supernatural person. Early in the book there is the prophecy, "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44). Here again is the idea of a future kingdom of God, a future exercise of sovereignty. God's kingdom will triumph over human kingdoms and is as everlasting as God himself. The human representative of God's sovereignty is introduced in Daniel 7:

I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed. (Vss. 13f.)

The feature of everlasting dominion connects this prophecy with that of 2:44. The basic idea of kingship is once more evident from the association with glory and dominion and from the submission rendered by all peoples. In speaking of the "son of man" receiving "dominion" there is restored the condition of the first man who was given dominion over God's creation (Genesis 1:26, 28). An individual is in view, even if a personification of a people. The New Testament reader immediately recalls that "Son of man" was a common self-designation employed by Jesus in

the Gospels (e.g. Matthew 16:13, 15; Mark 2:10; Luke 7:34; 9:58; 19:10). The passage in Daniel 7 continues by adding another dimension to the kingdom: "But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever" (vs. 18). When the kingdom was given to the "son of man," it was also given to the "saints of the Most High." Some have seen the "son of man" as simply a personification of the "saints," but it is perhaps better to see the "son of man" as joined by the "saints" in possessing the royal status. To anticipate, "saints" is a regular designation in the New Testament of Christians (e.g. Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; Revelation 14:12). They are "saints" through their union with Christ, the "holy one" (John 6:69), and he associates them with himself (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 3:13). This New Testament identification of Jesus Christ as "Son of man" and his disciples as "saints" links up with the language of Daniel 7 and prepares us for forthcoming studies.

Summary and Application

The manifestation of God's rule in the Old Testament was seen in the people of Israel. God chose human kings to represent him in the rule of the people. That kingdom of Israel was an imperfect manifestation of God's rule, so plans were made for a righteous descendant of David to occupy his throne in the future.

The Old Testament not only affirmed the present and eternal kingship of God but also held out hope for a future manifestation of God's kingdom. The note of expectation is loud and clear in the Old Testament prophets. God would act for the salvation of his people. A descendant of David, a son of man, would exercise God's kingly power. Post-biblical Jewish literature continued to use the word kingdom for God's expected intervention for the redemption of his people.

That God reigns is good news. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'" (Isaiah 52:7). Paul quotes from this verse in reference to preaching the gospel of Christ (Romans 10:15). For readers more familiar with this passage through that partial citation, it may be missed that the good

tidings which the prophet describes is the message that “God reigns!” That fact is a message of peace, good, and salvation. God is in control, and he is acting for salvation. As noted from Isaiah 33:22 above, “The Lord is our King; he will save us.”

Chapter 2

Review Questions

1. Where was God's kingdom revealed in a special way in Old Testament times?
2. Why did early Israel reject the idea of an earthly king?
3. When did Israel come to have a king?
4. How did God show his continuing kingship even during Israel's monarchy?
5. What relationship did Israel's king have to God?
6. Why was there need for a future manifestation of God's kingdom?
7. Cite some prophetic words about God's rule being in the future to Israel?
8. Reconcile Old Testament affirmations about the present and future rule of God.
9. Describe the characteristics of God's future reign according to the Old Testament prophets.
10. In what ways is the message that God reigns good news?

Chapter 3

THE KINGDOM AND JESUS

During the centuries immediately preceding the birth of Jesus, political kingship had come to an end among the Jewish people, and foreign nations ruled the land of ancient Israel and Judah. Assyria had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and deported many of the people; later Babylon did the same to the southern kingdom of Judah. Persia conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland but continued to rule over them. Greece and Rome each in turn conquered the ancient land of Israel and Judah. This circumstance intensified Jewish interest in the prophetic promises and the longing for God to act in the deliverance of his people from foreign rule. For many Jews this meant an expectation of an earthly king, both descended from David and like the idealized picture of him as the model king. Jesus was born into an atmosphere of dynamic expectation that God would break through from heaven and his kingship would be exercised in a new and powerful way in the earthly realm. The people were prepared to hear a message about the kingdom.

Jesus as King

Each of the Gospel writers has a characteristic emphasis in presenting the person of Jesus Christ: Mark presents Jesus as a powerful wonder-worker; Luke presents Jesus as compassionate Savior; and John presents Jesus as the eternal Word of God. By a similar generalization Matthew may be said to answer the Jewish expectation and to present Jesus as the king of Old Testament anticipation. Thus he traces Jesus' genealogy as "the son

of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1); he employs the phrase "son of David" nine times with reference to Jesus or about him; Jesus was born "king of the Jews" (2:2); the triumphal entry into Jerusalem was the coming of the king in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 (21:5; cf. Luke 19:38); Jesus died as "king of the Jews" (Matthew 27:11-42, and so in all the Gospels); the Gospel closes with Jesus possessing "all authority" (28:18). A characteristic of Matthew is his quotations of the Old Testament introduced with the formula, "To fulfill what was spoken by the prophet." Matthew preserves the saying about Jesus giving the "keys of the kingdom" (16:19). The famous block of teaching called the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7) may properly be called rules for living in the kingdom. The royal Jesus dominates Matthew's presentation of the person of Jesus, but Matthew, Mark and Luke all concur in giving the kingdom a central place in Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' Preaching

The kingdom of God was the theme of Jesus' preaching. The first three Gospel writers present summaries of Jesus' preaching at the beginning of their accounts of his ministry. Each summarizes his message in terms of the kingdom:

From that time [the arrest of John the Baptist] Jesus began to preach saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." . . . And he went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease. (Matthew 4:17, 23)

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14f.)

But he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." (Luke 4:43)

When Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand," he was declaring the fulfillment of Old

Testament prophecy. Chapter 1 studied the kingdom in the Old Testament, and Chapter 2 noticed some of the prophetic words declaring God would exercise his kingship in the future in a special way. Jesus declared that time had come. The God who is eternally King was acting in a new way and demonstrating his kingship in a new way. The future hope of the Old Testament prophets was coming to pass. That reality was being made manifest in the ministry of Jesus. It is often said that Jesus was the bearer of the kingdom; from the perspective of the Old Testament it might be better to say that the kingdom (God's saving intervention on behalf of his people) brought Jesus.

Terminology

Some definitions of terms are in order at the very outset. Chapter 1 taught us that kingdom in the Old Testament meant primarily kingship, the dignity and power of a king. As noted there, that primary meaning continued in New Testament language. Further demonstration of that meaning will be seen in the various New Testament passages considered in this chapter. Especially for the moment the concern will be with the usage of the Gospels in reference to the ministry of Jesus.

There is no difference between kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God. Matthew's summary of Jesus' preaching says that he called on his hearers to repent because the "kingdom of heaven" was at hand (Matthew 4:17). Mark in almost an identical statement says, "The kingdom of God" was at hand (Mark 1:14f.). That is typical. There are many parallel passages where Matthew says "kingdom of heaven" and Mark and Luke say "kingdom of God" in accounts of the same saying or teaching of Jesus. For instance, according to Matthew Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14); but according to Mark and Luke Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). According to Matthew 19:23 Jesus said, "It will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," but according to Mark 10:23 and Luke 18:24 his words

were, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God." Matthew reports that Jesus began his explanation of the parables to his disciples by saying, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11), but Mark reports, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11) and Luke similarly, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:10). Many more instances could be cited. It is obvious that the three writers are not recounting separate episodes or occasions but are giving the same saying in different words. Moreover the pattern is consistent. With few exceptions Matthew says "kingdom of heaven" and without exception Mark and Luke say "kingdom of God."

What is the explanation for this difference in wording? The Jews avoided the use of God's name so as not to break the commandment, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Hence they employed substitute terms in order to refer to God. A favorite substitute for the name of God was the term "heaven." The Gospels preserve some examples of this usage. Another instance in Matthew apart from the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is found in Jesus' question to the Jewish authorities, "The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men?" (21:25). "Heaven" stands for God: did the baptism of John have divine authority, or more personally stated, "Was it a command of God?" This use of heaven to mean God occurs even in Luke. In the parable of the prodigal son, when the son returned home, he confessed, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21). Once more heaven equals God. The sin was against God, not against "heaven" literally; and heaven is another way of referring to God as the one to whom he was ultimately accountable.

Matthew's Gospel reflects Jewish sensibilities and terminology in customarily using the phrase "kingdom of heaven." This language would not have communicated to the Greek and Roman worlds, or rather to the extent it did communicate it would have been misunderstood. "Heaven" would have suggested an impersonal principle to those of philosophical

inclination or the collective body of gods to the followers of the popular polytheistic religions. Hence, Luke and Mark, writing primarily with Greeks and Romans in mind, employed the term "God" in the statements where Matthew used "heaven." It is difficult to determine which manner of expression was used by Jesus himself. Jesus himself likely felt no hesitancy about using the word "God," but on the other hand he might have accommodated himself to the language of his Jewish hearers. At this distance we do not know, nor does it make much real difference in our understanding, to determine whether the accommodation was Jesus' or Matthew's.

Another phrase in the summaries of Jesus' preaching calls for comment: "at hand." The word translated "at hand" means "drawing near," "breaking in," "in process of coming." According to this statement by Jesus the kingdom was close but not fully arrived. Thus, the characteristic emphasis in Jesus' preaching was that the kingdom was future, but near.

Chapter 3

Review Questions

1. Why was Jewish expectation of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy strong at the time of Jesus' life?
2. How, in general, do each of the Gospels present Jesus?
3. Give examples of Matthew's emphasis on kingship.
4. What was the theme of Jesus' preaching?
5. How do the first three Gospel writers summarize Jesus' preaching?
6. "The time is fulfilled" means what?
7. Is there a difference between "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God"? Give indications that "heaven" was substituted for "God" in Jewish usage.
8. Which Gospel writer prefers the phrase "kingdom of heaven"?
9. Why do the Gospel writers employ these different expressions to describe the kingdom?
10. What does "at hand" mean?

Chapter 4

INTERPRETING JESUS' PREACHING

Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom of God has been the center of much scholarly debate in the interpretation of the Gospels and of the person and mission of Jesus. This debate is too involved for discussion here, but a simplified survey will focus some of the issues important for this study.

Schemes of Interpretation

Many different schemes of interpretation have been advanced for understanding the idea of the kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus. There is the utopian view, a secular understanding, which interprets the kingdom as a perfected social order. It normally sees the kingdom as a human achievement. This view is given a religious coloring when that perfect social order is seen as brought about by following the principles of Jesus. The interpretation associated with theological liberalism in Protestantism (especially in the Social Gospel form) has points of contact with this social utopian view. This view typically emphasizes the rule of God in the hearts of men and so human obedience to God as the way to bring about a better society. The emphasis is on human response and not on divine activity. The traditional Roman Catholic interpretation, going back at least as far as the church father Augustine in the early fifth century, has identified the kingdom with the church. The church is God's city or kingdom on earth preparing human beings for the heavenly kingdom. The apocalyptic interpretation of the kingdom (or "consistent eschatology") became especially prominent

in Protestant critical scholarship in the early twentieth century. The apocalyptic view of the kingdom saw it as a supernatural act of God when history would be broken off and a new heavenly order of existence begun. On this interpretation the kingdom for Jesus was altogether future and supernatural. A corollary was that his expectation of an immediate end to history was mistaken. In reaction against the apocalyptic view some scholars advanced the idea of realized eschatology. On this interpretation the kingdom was wholly present for Jesus and a future eschatology was downplayed.

Although isolated scriptures might be cited to support any one or all of these views (with the possible exception of the utopian view), no one of these interpretations is adequate for all of the data. The proponent of any of these views must choose one set of scriptures and on some basis rule out the others. One group of sayings of Jesus will normally be taken as normative for the understanding of all the others. Extreme critics disallow sayings not fitting the adopted scheme of interpretation as additions which the early church attributed to Jesus. A better approach is to listen attentively to all of the data in scripture and look for a unifying thread. Subsequent to the interpretations listed above, a scheme of interpretation sometimes called "inaugurated eschatology" gained prominence in Biblical studies. On this view the ministry of Jesus marks the beginning or inauguration of the last days. There is both a present and a future dimension to the kingdom in Jesus' proclamation. With some modifications this is the perspective adopted in this and the following chapters.

Actually, as we shall see, if we accept all the Gospel evidence, Jesus spoke of the kingdom as both present and future. We will see various reasons why he felt no sense of contradicting himself. For now, consider just one: Jesus could speak of the kingdom as present and future because both aspects of the kingdom are visitations of the same God and manifestations of the same divine rule to accomplish the same redemptive purpose. In this respect, Jesus' statements about both a present and a future reign of God are no different in kind from the Old Testament declarations to the effect that "God is King" and "God will become King." If we moderns are confused at this, the reason

may be that we have not shifted our thinking from the mortal to the immortal. In a mortal kingdom, we do not crown a person king until the previous king is dead: "The king is dead. Long live the king!" No doubt some of Jesus' hearers were confused in the same way. As we ponder Jesus' statements, let's remind ourselves that an *eternal* kingdom simply has to be conceived of in a different way than a mortal kingdom.

The Future Kingdom

The future reference seems to be primary in Jesus' message about the kingdom, so we consider it first. Although some scholars have seen a present meaning in the word translated "at hand," most students have not accepted this explanation in a full sense. At the least it may be said that of the passages where the meaning may be determined with some certainty, kingdom in the teaching of Jesus more frequently has a future reference than a present reference. Some passages are difficult to place, whether referring to the present or to the future kingdom, so I will stay with those which seem clearest. Actually, as will be seen in the next chapter, Jesus' main concern was with the nature of God's rule and not with the question of present or future, or any timetable for manifestations of the divine rule (e.g. Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:6f.).

Sometimes Jesus placed the coming of the kingdom in the near or immediate future. "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). The interpretation of this verse has been much disputed. Most, perhaps, have interpreted the statement as a reference to the second coming of Jesus and the eschatological kingdom, as might be indicated by the preceding verse (Mark 8:38). The kingdom of which Jesus speaks clearly has something to do with the "Son of man" (compare the wording of the parallel in Matthew 16:27, "For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father. . . . Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom"). A few have interpreted Mark 9:1 in the light of the following narrative of the transfiguration; that event was the power of

the kingdom which some of his disciples saw before their death. Another possibility is to connect this verse with Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection in Mark 8:31, the verse at the beginning of the paragraph which 9:1 ends.

There is much to be said for this last view and for understanding the words of Mark 9:1 in relation to the resurrection of Jesus and his subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit. These words speak of a powerful manifestation of the rule of God. The kingship of God was exercised with power in the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit by the risen Jesus. Notice the way in which "power," kingly power, is associated with these events. "The gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated [appointed, coronated] Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:3f.). The royal son of David assumed the official position of "Son of God," that is king (Psalms 2:7 and see Chapter 2), at the resurrection. That resurrection was an act of power by the sovereign God on behalf of his chosen (Romans 1:2) viceregent. Ephesians 1:19f. offers the prayer that the readers might know "what is the immeasurable greatness of his [God's] power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion." The greatest manifestation of the power of God was raising Jesus from the dead and installing him as ruler of his universe. The question of the disciples in the context of the resurrection, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) lends support to the interpretation put forth here. Jesus signalled his resurrection and the inauguration of his rule by sending the Holy Spirit on his disciples. This bestowal of the Spirit also is associated in scripture with power. Jesus before his ascension promised his disciples, "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The Acts' version of Jesus' farewell promise is, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). The Holy

Spirit conveyed something of Jesus' royal power to his disciples. The resurrection and subsequent gift of the Spirit, therefore, were acts of power. It does not seem unlikely that the "kingdom of God come with power" could be related to these powerful manifestations of God's sovereignty exercised through the "Son of man."

Whatever the precise meaning of Mark 9:1, Jesus anticipated the powerful breaking-in of God's kingdom in the near future. Sometimes, in addition, Jesus associated the kingdom with heaven and placed it at the end of this age. Although many interpreters have assumed this final and ultimate kingdom is the same as that which Jesus placed in the immediate future, the meaning of kingship or reign and the Old Testament statements giving various applications of the idea of the kingdom of God remove any necessity that this be the case and indeed make likely that various manifestations of the kingdom might be in view in different contexts. The heavenly kingdom is in view in Matthew 8:11f. "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." The "sons of the kingdom" were the Jewish people, who should have inherited the "kingdom of heaven." But they had proved themselves unresponsive to the King. Those "from east and west" were the Gentiles. They would join the patriarchs of God's people at the messianic banquet at the end of the age.

These expressions of the kingdom — both in Jesus' immediate future consequent to the resurrection and gift of the Spirit and at the end of time in heaven — will be studied more fully later.

The Present Kingdom

For the purposes of the present chapter the study will emphasize that the kingdom was present in the ministry of Jesus. The kingdom was present because the King (or the King designate) was here. The teaching of Jesus will come in for special consideration in Chapter 7 on the parables of the kingdom. In this chapter the attention will be more on the deeds or activities of Jesus.

We begin this section by elaborating on the presentation of Jesus as son of David and therefore as King. As the royal offspring, he was qualified to assume the prerogatives assigned in the Old Testament prophecies to the righteous Branch of David (e.g. Jeremiah 23:5). The first verse of the New Testament introduces "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). The angel in announcing the conception of Jesus said to Mary concerning the son she was to bear:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High;
and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,
and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever;
and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:32f.)

This is an important verse for our purposes. It declares that Jesus is both Son of God and son of David. As such he will be given the throne of David to rule over God's people. He will reign for ever, and his kingship will not come to an end, as David's did. His kingdom thus will be identified with God's kingdom, which is also everlasting (recall Psalms 145:13). One passage specifically links together the kingdom of God and Christ: "Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolator), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:5).

The kingdom which Jesus preached was inseparable from the person of Jesus himself. It is instructive in this regard to compare the wording in the different Gospels of the acclamations of the crowd as they greeted Jesus on his last entry into Jerusalem. "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matthew 21:9). "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!" (Mark 11:9f.). "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38). Whereas Mark speaks of the kingdom of David that is coming, Matthew speaks of the son of David and Luke speaks of the King that is coming. Jesus as king brought the kingdom.

Jesus' miracles were the kingdom of God in action. They demonstrated the kingly power which was his. Jesus countered the charge that he did his mighty works by Satanic power with his own claim, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). Note in passing that this is one of the few instances where Matthew uses "kingdom of God" rather than "kingdom of heaven." The verb translated "come" is different from the verb translated "is at hand." This verse actually says that the kingdom is present. The power of the kingdom was at work in Jesus' deeds. He was restoring things to the situation which God's rule intended. The power of the future kingdom had entered history in the person of Jesus.

The context of Matthew 12:28 pertains to Jesus' healing a "blind and dumb" man whose condition was caused by a demon (Matthew 12:22). It was especially in his conflicts with demons that Jesus associated his power with the kingdom. The expelling of demonic forces was the result of Jesus' kingly presence, not a preparation for his rule. Divine sovereignty was powerfully at work. The kingdom had a special manifestation in the defeat of Satan and the casting of evil spirits out of persons they had invaded. Satan has a kingdom. To the charge that he cast out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, Jesus answered, "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?" (Matthew 12:26). But Jesus is stronger than Satan; his kingdom is more powerful. Jesus continued his response with this illustration: "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house" (Matthew 12:29). The "strong man" is Satan, but Jesus is the stronger. His mighty deeds bound Satan. The possessions held in the strong man's house were human beings under his control; Jesus released them from Satan's power.

Mark 3:20-30 and Luke 11:14-23 also relate this incident from the life of Jesus and Jesus' claim to be stronger than Satan. Luke further relates this claim to the presence of the kingdom or rule of God, in words similar to Matthew: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20).

Luke 17:20f. has received various interpretations: (1) the kingdom is present “among you”; (2) the kingdom is “within you” as an inner spiritual principle; or (best) (3) the kingdom is “within your power,” within the scope of your choices, within your reach.

God’s kingly power was at work through Jesus. His mighty works were more than signs of the divine reign; they were the kingdom at work. Nevertheless the kingdom was less than fully realized; hence the statements about the kingdom as still future.

When we understand the kingdom as the rule of God, there is no contradiction between thinking of the kingdom as both present and future in the teachings of Jesus. Different manifestations were in view. Present and future can be different expressions of the one divine rule. But present and future in this case may be related in another way, since they are held together by the person of Jesus and what was done through him. Some illustrations may be suggestive of how to look at the kingdom as both present and future in relation to Jesus. Dawn precedes sunrise. The rising sun sends its light in advance of its arrival. The kingdom of God was sending its rays in advance during the ministry of Jesus. The full manifestation was yet to come during Jesus’ career. Another illustration is provided by the way in which an important event, such as graduation or a wedding, dominates the scene for days or weeks in advance. Anticipation is so powerful that it even affects our verb forms! What engaged couple would use the stern future tense (“We will marry on June 1st.”) when all their excitement comes out in the present continuous (“We *are getting* married June 1st!”)? In the nine-month wait for a new baby, doesn’t part of the joy lie in saying, “We *are having* a baby!”? To say that we “are having” or “are getting” is our way of connecting the present with the future. We try to possess something now that we also expect to enjoy in the future. With this in mind, we begin to understand Jesus’ saying that “The kingdom of God *is at hand*” — both present and forthcoming. In the same way Jesus put the requirements of the kingdom of God ahead of all human concerns: “Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60).

The kingdom was present in the ministry of Jesus, but its fullest manifestations were yet future, and those future manifestations will be studied in later chapters. As the kingdom was both present and future in the Old Testament, and as it is both present and future for Christians, so it was for Jesus.

Chapter 4

Review Questions

1. Describe the principal schemes for interpreting Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom.
2. What is wrong with these schemes of interpretation?
3. Why do we have trouble with the kingdom being both present and future?
4. How does "inaugurated eschatology" account for both present and future elements in Jesus' teaching about the kingdom?
5. What are some interpretations advanced for Mark 9:1?
6. Cite some passages where Jesus associated the kingdom with the end of the present age and with heaven.
7. What is Jesus' relation to king David?
8. How do Jesus' miracles relate to the kingdom?
9. What does the casting out of demons say about the kingdom?
10. Suggest your own illustrations of how the future may be so influential as to be considered already present.

Chapter 5

BEHOLD THE KING

In Chapter 1 it was emphasized that the kingdom belongs to God. The phrase “kingdom of God” in the Gospels underscores the same point. Nevertheless, Jesus, as the manifestation of God, is also proclaimed in the New Testament as King. God’s kingship had a human representative in the kings of Israel; in Jesus there is a perfect revelation of God as King. God was present in Jesus. The kingdom in Jesus and in his ministry advances our understanding of God’s kingdom in some significant ways. Jesus’ presentation of the kingdom provides a corrective to many misunderstandings about the kingdom.

Lessons to Be Learned

The kingdom is not a human achievement. *The kingdom is God’s.* Men and women do not build the kingdom of God. They may be co-workers with God, but the kingdom is God’s work. “Kingdom of God” sums up God’s dealings with men. God offers his kingdom to men and women. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). He appoints the kingdom like a covenant. Jesus promised to his twelve disciples, “As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29f.). The kingdom is God’s, but he gives it to whom he chooses. He appointed it for Christ, and he in turn appointed it to the twelve. But all who identify with Christ’s “little flock” receive the kingdom as God’s gift.

The kingdom is God's, but he exercises his kingly rule now through Christ. *The kingdom is present where Jesus is.* The future is a present reality in Jesus Christ. Not only did Jesus claim that the kingdom was present in his deeds (Matthew 12:28), but his followers continued to identify the kingdom with him. In the preaching of the early church the kingdom of God was linked with the name of Jesus Christ. "When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Paul was "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31). After the coming of Jesus the kingdom of God is associated with Jesus Christ.

The kingdom is active. The presence of the kingdom was recognized in the deeds of Jesus. His mighty works manifested the power of the kingdom. As Paul put it, "For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

The kingdom of God is God's power at work for salvation. *The kingdom of God brings salvation.* The rule of God comes when Jesus releases a person from the control of Satan, drives out demons, and forgives sins. That is the work of God, the activity of the kingdom through Jesus. He brings deliverance from Satan, however Satan's influence may be experienced in one's life. For the association of the kingdom with salvation note further Revelation 12:10, "And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God!'" Other virtually synonymous terms are instructive for this association of the kingdom with salvation. The kingdom means redemption. Notice the two following parallel statements: "Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. . . . So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:28, 31). In a similar way the kingdom is paralleled with life: "And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter

life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. . . . And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell” (Mark 9:43, 47). In extension of this parallel it may be noted that the Gospel of John speaks often of eternal life whereas the other three Gospels most often speak of the kingdom. Finally, righteousness is associated with the kingdom, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Matthew 6:33; cf. Luke 12:31). God’s righteousness is his activity in justifying, or making righteous, his people. To seek the rule of God is to seek his righteousness, to submit to his justifying activity. Paul expanded on the thought in his words, “For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). Such statements warn against a materialistic and external understanding of the kingdom.

How to Receive the Kingdom

The passages about receiving or accepting the kingdom are consistent with the idea of the kingdom as the saving rule of God. When we receive the kingdom, we receive salvation, redemption, life, and righteousness. Since God works now through Jesus Christ as his appointed king, when we receive Christ, we receive the kingdom. These blessings of the kingdom are to be found in Christ. That makes it important to learn what Jesus said about how to receive the kingdom. God gives the kingdom (Luke 12:32 above), but human beings must receive it. How do I receive this gift?

Jesus taught that the essential quality for receiving the kingdom is *humility*. “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (Mark 10:15). “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3f.). We might think of many admirable qualities in small children (and some not so admirable), but the quality which Jesus is commending here for our imitation is humility. The kingdom is a gift and must be received as a child

receives a gift — with joy, eagerness, and lack of self-consciousness. The child is teachable and places his trust in others. Remember the quality which Jesus placed first when he gave the characteristics of his disciples in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

For grown-ups, with their pride, their self-confidence, their assumed roles in life, it is necessary to “turn” in order to assume the childlike quality of humility. A change is necessary. The Bible calls that change *repentance*. Jesus’ announcement of the coming kingdom carried a call to repentance. “The kingdom of heaven is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). In response to God’s act in Christ one must turn from sin to God. That is what repentance means: to turn away from sin and to turn to God. The kingdom calls for a decision. Who rules your life?

That kind of change can be hard to make. Receiving the kingdom requires *effort*. God’s gift of the kingdom is not “cheap grace.” It requires some hard choices (cf. Luke 14:25-33).

As they were going along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” But he said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:57-62)

This idea of the effort required to enter the kingdom may be the thought in a saying of Jesus, difficult to interpret, reported by both Matthew and Luke. “The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently” (Luke 16:16); “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven

has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). Perhaps Jesus is commenting on the efforts to bring in the kingdom by means of physical force, but he is saying that in a spiritual sense strenuous effort is demanded in the service of God. The saying is a further indication of the presence of the kingdom in some sense in the period following John the Baptist.

Significance

In view of the humility, repentance, and effort needed to enter the kingdom, is it any wonder that Jesus described it as being "born anew"? Birth has always been connected with citizenship whether in a tribe, clan, nomadic people, kingdom, or republic. The Romans even gave us a term — *jus soli* ("right of soil") — for our right to be citizens of the country where we are born. The apostle Paul claimed the rights of a Roman citizen because of his birth (Acts 22:27-28). It was natural, then, for the Jewish leader Nicodemus to believe that physical birth — his being of Abraham's seed — had settled his citizenship, making him a citizen of God's nation. Jesus startled him by saying that he had to be born again (John 3:3), this time spiritually for a place in God's spiritual kingdom.

The humility, repentance, and effort required to enter the kingdom are tough demands (to some of us, as tough as Jesus' demand that Nicodemus discount his own Jewishness). The Bible emphasizes this in another figure for entering the kingdom: to die and be raised. Earthly citizenship doesn't ask anything so drastic! Naturalization may require waiting lists, examinations, interviews, or oaths, but not sinking into the grave and being lifted back out. Yet the Christian's naturalization ceremony — baptism — symbolizes exactly that. Paul explains that "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death," that is, "buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

Think of that new life as life in a new country. Just as some have escaped under gunfire from East Berlin, some Christians have escaped the rule of drug addiction, criminality, sexual compulsion, racial hatred, or religious demagoguery. Whatever the

cost of entering God's kingdom, they count it a bargain to gain a place of safety and a life of joy.

The kingdom is present in Jesus. Jesus is God's agent of redemption now. The verdict to be passed in the final judgment is already determined by the attitude adopted toward Jesus in the present. "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32f.). A person's response to Jesus is his response to God. "Behold, the King!"

Chapter 5

Review Questions

1. Why is it important to emphasize that the kingdom belongs to God?
2. How does God exercise his kingly rule now?
3. Is the kingdom an active or a passive concept?
4. God uses his power to what purpose?
5. With what results is the kingdom parallel?
6. Do we have a part in receiving the kingdom? How does this contrast with other ideas in the religious world?
7. Why is humility important for receiving the kingdom?
8. Define repentance.
9. Is effort required to enter the kingdom?
10. The relation of Jesus to the kingdom of God has what significant application to my spiritual choices?

Chapter 6

TO WHAT SHALL WE LIKEN THE KINGDOM?

The preceding studies have shown that the kingdom of God is the rule of God; it is God at work. God was supremely at work in Jesus Christ; where Christ is, there is the kingdom. The ministry of Jesus, especially the miracles, was a demonstration of the kingdom.

This chapter will consider the kingdom in the preaching and teaching of Jesus. The kingdom of God was the theme of Jesus' ministry (Mark 1:14f.). What did he mean by the kingdom?

Synonyms for the Kingdom

Chapter 5 noticed some of the terms used synonymously with kingdom, especially terms associated with the idea of salvation. The kingdom means redemption. The approach of redemption is the approach of the kingdom (Luke 21:28, 31). The kingdom is equated with life. One man asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus' answer spoke of the difficulty for those with riches to enter the kingdom of God (Mark 10:17,24f.) The kingdom is associated with God's righteousness (Matthew 6:33). The kingdom of God is God working to make men righteous.

There are some other ideas used synonymously with the kingdom. These will further develop the theme of the characteristics of the kingdom and reinforce the points made in the parables of the kingdom. The kingdom is associated with the will of

God and the name of God. Jesus' model prayer for his disciples contains the petitions:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9f.)

The three middle expressions are equivalent (see further Chapter 10). The kingdom of God is the will of God. To do his will is to hallow (sanctify) his name. When his will is done, his kingdom has come. This is true both for the individual and for the world as a whole. These are petitions that all three of these equivalent concepts may be realized on earth even as they are done in heaven.

Kingdom and glory also are virtually equivalent concepts. Mark's account of the request of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, quotes their words as, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (Mark 10:37). Matthew's account has the request coming through their mother and stated as, "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom" (Matthew 20:21). The request is clearly identical. To exercise kingship is to be in glory. The kingdom expresses the grandeur and splendor of Christ. The word glory was often associated with God's kingship in the Old Testament (Chapter 1). It is significant that the glory is attributed to his Son in the New Testament.

Parables

Jesus told stories (we call them parables) to teach his lessons. Many of those stories illustrate the kingdom of God.

What are the parables? An old and popular definition is that a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." A more sophisticated and comprehensive definition of Jesus' parables is "narrative metaphors" which invite participation by the hearers. We may go further in gaining an understanding of the parables by noting some of their principal characteristics.

(1) First, and obviously, a parable is a similitude or likeness. Jesus often began a parable with words such as, “The kingdom is like to” A parable makes a comparison — even if not explicitly, a comparison is suggested. There is something in the story that has a point of comparison to the spiritual lesson intended. This point in common served to illustrate, indeed to make unforgettable, the application intended.

(2) Second, the parables were taken, for the most part, from nature or from common life. They were stories based on the familiar experiences of the hearers. Jesus’ stories had to do with what did happen or could happen. That makes them a rich source for understanding life in Jesus’ time, but that is not why we study them and why we remember them. Jesus told these familiar stories to illustrate an unfamiliar or unrecognized truth. That is what gave them their point in his time and makes them memorable still today.

(3) Third, the parables each had one main teaching. They were not allegories in which each point of the story had another meaning. Often the details in a parable were simply to set the stage for the main point or to make the whole story true to life. The interpreter should not try to find a meaning in every detail in a parable. Sometimes correspondences have to be pointed out in order to make the transfer from the story to the lesson taught (as in the sower — Matthew 13:1-23). The applications of the teaching of a parable might be multiple, but the basic meaning of a parable was singular and the varied applications derive from that single point. The fact that modern interpreters are often not agreed on what the main thrust of a given parable was does not obviate this characteristic. Sometimes several lessons might seem to be equally appropriate for Jesus to have given and no doubt his hearers often took his words in different ways; yet this is not justification for an allegorizing interpretation and especially not for opening the parables to any meaning one might want to see in them.

(4) Fourth, the parables belonged to the setting of Jesus’ ministry. The lesson was primarily applicable to the people in Jesus’ time. The seeming timelessness of some of the parables does not contradict this. A universal truth is often found in a very particular incident. The continuing validity of Jesus’ teachings is

derived from the constants of human nature and the universality of God's truth. Jesus spoke to specific situations and specific needs. The interpreter should look for this context in Jesus' ministry in order to determine the specific point which Jesus wanted to make. When that is done, he can then make some applications to present situations. That application, however, has to be anchored in the original intent of the parable in order to be a valid application of its teaching.

(5) Fifth, the parables were challenges to think and decide. They were a call to action. They were not "nice little stories to entertain." They were challenging to Jesus' hearers and are challenging to readers today. Sometimes the parables were provided with an interpretation; most often they were not. Even when provided with an explanation, a parable engaged the hearer to think through the point, to see what the situation demanded, and to act accordingly.

(6) Sixth, the parables both revealed and concealed truth. This paradox is expressed by Jesus' own comment to his disciples about the parables: "And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven' " (Mark 4:11f.). This might seem to contradict what has been said above about the parables making a comparison from familiar experiences, but not all saw the point which Jesus intended. Revelation is perceptible only to the spiritually responsive. The parables revealed truth to some; to others they concealed it. This was in part because the hearer was often left to draw his own conclusion. For instance, Jesus concluded the parable of "The Good Samaritan" with the question, "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (Luke 10:36). The answer might seem to us obvious, but still the hearer had to make his own decision. Those who did not want to perceive and to understand did not. From them the parables concealed the plain force of Jesus' teaching. To those with spiritual insight and sensitive hearing the parables opened up the divine truth. The situation is still the same today.

Chapter 6

Review Questions

1. What are some terms used synonymously with the kingdom in the New Testament?
2. What does the kingdom have to do with salvation, life, and righteousness?
3. What do the opening petitions of the Lord's prayer tell us about the kingdom?
4. With the understanding of kingdom developed in this study can we pray the Lord's prayer today?
5. Define a parable.
6. What are the characteristics of Jesus' parables?
7. How does a parable differ from an allegory?
8. Does the application of the parables to people in Jesus' time mean they are not applicable to us today? Give reasons to support your answer.
9. How do the parables both reveal and conceal truth?
10. To what extent did Jesus use parables to teach about the kingdom? What was his concern in this teaching?

Chapter 7

THE KINGDOM PARABLES OF JESUS

The discussion of the characteristics of the parables in the preceding chapter prepares us for a study of the parables of the kingdom. These parables reinforced Jesus' teaching about the kingdom as bringing a sense of urgency and unexpected opportunity. They also portray the characteristics of the kingdom of God. The main emphasis of Jesus' teaching was not on whether the kingdom is present or future (Chapter 4 developed the thought that from different perspectives it was both.) Rather the main concern of Jesus in his parables was the essential character of the kingdom and its absolute demands. Some of the kingdom parables will now be examined for the characteristics of the kingdom which they teach.

Characteristics of the Kingdom

The kingdom is *powerful*. This is the message of the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. They are recounted in all three synoptic Gospels. The Lukan version is as follows:

He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened." (Luke 13:18-21; cf. Matthew 13:31-33; Mark 4:30-32)

The kingdom of God is like seed and like yeast. The plant to which reference is made has exceedingly small seeds (the description as "smallest of all seeds" in Matthew 13:32 is not to be pressed too literally) yet grows several feet taller than a man. This is a particularly impressive example of what is true of other plants: the end product is much greater than the seed from which it comes. Leaven, or yeast, too has a powerful result. A very small amount can affect a large amount of dough.

The parables of growth present a polarity between beginning and end. One author has described it as "unremarkable beginnings and unimaginable endings." Something as small as a seed can produce a tree. A little yeast permeates the whole lump of dough. The kingdom of God is like that! The kingdom is dynamic, powerful, productive. The influence of the divine rule may appear to be small, insignificant. The Bible teaches us not to "despise the day of small things" (Zechariah 4:10). The kingdom of God carries within it the power of God. It may not work in the ostentatious ways of earthly kingdoms, but its effects are nonetheless powerful.

This power is offered by God as a gift. The kingdom of God is a *gracious gift*.

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, 'Behold, I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.' " But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find." And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. (Matthew 22:2-10; cf. Luke 14:15-24)

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding feast. God offers his gracious blessings to those who will respond. This parable conforms to the characteristic of being something based on life and something that could happen. The story was *possible*, but in reality it was *unthinkable*. There was not only the unimaginable discourtesy of having accepted the first invitation and then refusing the summons when everything was ready. This was a wedding feast prepared by a king for his son. There would be food and entertainment such as would be a once in a lifetime treat for those invited. In the ordinary course of human affairs there was absolutely nothing that would keep a person who had been invited from being present at such an occasion. Yet that in effect is what the Jewish people in Jesus' day had done. They had rejected God's invitation to the blessings of the messianic banquet. The religious people, the "good people" of Jesus' time, had rejected God's gracious gift. Therefore, the invitation was extended to the Gentiles, the outcasts, so that the banquet hall could be filled with guests.

Those who have accepted the kingdom of God should not forget why they have attained whatever measure of goodness they have. It is because of God's grace; it is because his kingdom has been given to them. Having become to some degree good, we must not refuse the kingdom to others and decide that they are not good enough. We must not become like the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day and think that we have attained our position by ourselves and refuse what more God has for us. The parable of the marriage feast, in the form in which it is told, is unthinkable; but on the other hand, is it not true to the way people continually spurn God's invitations? The gifts are there, but in unconcern or in involvement in earthly affairs, we neglect the call of the kingdom.

Another parable recorded by Matthew illustrates the generosity of God:

For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

Likewise he went to the marketplace at the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours and found workers to labor in his vineyard, but without contracting with them a set wage.

And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first." And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, saying "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? So the last will be first, and the first last. (Matthew 20:1-16)

The kingdom of heaven is like a generous employer who rewards his servants with more than they deserve. Once more the point of the parable in the context of Jesus' ministry was the Jewish leaders who had for long been in positions of responsibility and now begrudged the calling of others to share the privileges of the kingdom. The point was soon to be extended in the calling of the Gentiles, and it has been repeated many times as those who have borne a lifetime of labor are tempted to resent others who enter into the rewards of their labors. But the significance of the parable for the theme of the kingdom remains that God is a giving God.

The kingdom is God's gift, as seen already from Luke 12:32. The kingdom is like a king who gives a feast and an employer who pays more than the laborer has earned.

This gracious gift is of great value. The kingdom of God is *valuable*.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)

The kingdom is like a man finding treasure buried in a field. It was a common practice in ancient times to bury valuables such as coins or the family silver in the ground when danger threatened. Often the owner was never able to return to reclaim what he had hidden, so the treasure remained lost until a later discovery. Only a few weeks before the time of this writing an archaeologist working in Israel told me of the recent discovery of a hoard of three hundred gold coins uncovered in an archaeological dig. Such is not uncommon. The man of this parable made his discovery accidentally. Under the circumstances, according to Jewish law, he had the right to what he had found; so he was actually going beyond the legal requirements in purchasing the field in order to remove any question about his lawful claim to the treasure. But such considerations miss the main point of Jesus' lesson: the eagerness and sacrifice with which the man sought possession of the treasure.

The kingdom is like a merchant who finds an expensive pearl. Unlike the man in the former parable this merchant was seeking the pearl of great price. He knew what he wanted, and when he found it he made every effort to possess it.

In its value the kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field or like a pearl of great price. It is worth sacrificing all in order to possess. The two men in these two parables had one thing in common: they both sold all they had in order to buy what they had found. The rule of God calls for supreme sacrifice. One must be willing to part with all in order to obtain it. That is the supreme worth of the kingdom.

Both men had something else in common. They acted when they had the opportunity. Something of such value one obtains when he can, or he risks not getting it at all. Personally, I like routine, but Jesus says to prepare for the unexpected and seize the opportunity. The kingdom of God is that valuable. Whether found accidentally or as the result of diligent search, it is worth giving up all and acting immediately in order to possess.

This valuable gift of God is forgiveness of sins. The kingdom of God brings *forgiveness*. The rule of God carries with it remission of sins.

Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him the lord released him and forgave him the debt. (Matthew 18:23-27)

The kingdom is like a king who forgave his slave. This is another of Jesus' stories which was conceivable by his hearers but gained its point from being all but incredible. The debt of ten thousand talents was an impossibly huge one. One of the wealthiest Romans before economic resources were concentrated in the emperor was Crassus, and his property was valued at just over eight thousand talents. Imagining a private debt of the magnitude of ten thousand talents in the ancient world is comparable to efforts to comprehend the national debt of the United States today.

The continuation of the parable in verses 28-35 was the main point intended in the context of Matthew 18. The slave who had been forgiven the astronomically large debt refused to forgive his fellow-slave an incomparably smaller debt. The experience of the forgiveness of God should lead one to be forgiving to his fellow servants. Failure to extend forgiveness blocks the path to receiving God's forgiveness (cf. Matthew 7:14f.). What gives meaning and possibility to human forgiveness, however, is God's forgiveness. And that forgiveness is now extended through Jesus Christ (cf. Mark 2:1-12).

The kingdom is God through Jesus seeking and saving the lost. Luke 15 presents three parables of lost things. God is like a shepherd seeking a lost sheep, a woman sweeping her house to find a lost coin and a father running out to welcome home a repentant son. God is like that. That is the kind of God who is the

King of the universe — a King interested in seeking and saving, a God who forgives.

These characteristics of the kingdom — its power, its graciousness, its value, its forgiving nature — may make the next characteristic surprising. But there is another side to the rule of God. The kingdom *provokes resistance*. As noted in the preceding chapter, Satan too has a kingdom (Matthew 12:26). Satan opposes God's kingdom. These two forces are in conflict. Hence, the kingdom of God requires an ultimate separation from the enemy.

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?" He said to them, "An enemy has done this." The servants said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" But he said, "No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn." (Matthew 13:24-30)

Another parable has apparently a similar theme:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind; when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into vessels but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. (Matthew 13:47-50)

The kingdom is like a man sowing good seed, but his enemy sows tares or weeds. The man's slaves wanted to root out the weeds immediately. They were like the Zealots in Jesus' time who

wanted to bring in the kingdom of God by physical force. Jesus said, "Not so!" Such are not the methods of God's reign. The good and bad grow together until the harvest. But there is coming a time of judgment in which the weeds will be burned but the wheat gathered into God's granary.

The kingdom is like a net that draws all kinds. Among those professing the service of God there are to be found all kinds. The worthy and unworthy are separated by the demands of the kingdom. Even so, at the close of the age, there is a final separation of the righteous from the evil, the true citizens of the kingdom from the false.

The word of God is the message of the kingdom. In other parables Jesus compared preaching the word of God to sowing seeds (Luke 8:4-15 and Matthew 13:1-9; Matthew 13:18-23 and Mark 4:1-20; Mark 4:26-29). Some reject and oppose the message of the kingdom. It may be God's announcement of good news, yet there are those who resist it. The kingdom provokes opposition from God's enemies.

Moreover, there are those drawn to the message who do not fully accept it or conform their lives to the will of the King. Sincere people must not let the presence of sin in the church hinder or affect their own decisions. One should only expect that God's dragnet would bring in all kinds of fish, good and bad. The parables teach that the presence of sinners does not alter God's plans: the harvest takes place as scheduled, even though the enemy is sure to have sown bad seed. Moreover, God's plans have taken the sinners into account. Tares will be separated from the wheat, and the bad fish separated from the good. The warning in these parables is clear since people can *choose* whether to be wheat or weeds, *choose* what kind of fish to be.

This leads us to the next characteristic of the kingdom, that it requires a person to act. The kingdom of God *demand*s a *decision*. It was suggested in Chapter 2 that Matthew 11:12 and Luke 16:16 may refer to the requirement of vigorous effort on the part of those who would enter the kingdom. The Zealots of the first century misunderstood this to mean physical violence. The renunciation of physical force does not mean that human beings have nothing to do. The kingdom is God's, but that does

not eliminate human decision and human activity. The kingdom is God's decision for human salvation (a decision already made but still to be accomplished, so both present and future); it requires a human decision (so it combines an eschatological and an ethical aspect).

Jesus' preaching said that because of the kingdom his hearers needed to repent.

What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." And he answered, "I will not"; but afterward he repented and went. And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, "I will go, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." (Matthew 21:28-31)

Once more Jesus' parable engaged his hearers in determining its meaning. "What do you think?" The meaning of the parable was determined by the response of the hearer. The father summoned his sons to work. The kingdom of God requires work. The Jewish religious leaders were like the second son. They had said to God that they would work in his vineyard, but they did not actually do as God wanted them to do. The sinners of the time, who initially had refused the will of God, heard the call of the kingdom, repented, and went to work in God's vineyard. Both had to make a decision. Their actions and not their words expressed what that decision really was.

The parable of the wedding feast from Matthew 22:2-10 was quoted above. Many had been invited, but when the time for the feast came, "they made light of it" and went off to other affairs. They were like the second son in the parable of the two sons. When the invitation was finally rejected, others (who might have seemed unlikely candidates and outcasts) were brought in for the festivities. The kingdom of heaven is like a wedding feast, but strangely many refuse the invitation. It is not what we say but what we do which really determines our response to God.

God gives the kingdom (Luke 12:32), but human beings must receive the gift. It is not forced upon them. Amazing as it is,

many reject God's gifts. The kingdom message calls upon all to repent and to go to work for God.

The kingdom of God, therefore, *requires readiness and perseverance.*

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise replied, "Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves." And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." But he replied, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matthew 25:1-13)

The situation of the kingdom is similar to the circumstance of village girls waiting for the arrival of a wedding party. The custom of the wedding feast has already been observed in another parable of Jesus. The essential part of the marriage was the transfer of the bride to the house of the bridegroom. These maidens were awaiting the arrival of the wedding party: either for the banquet or more likely to prepare the bride and marriage chamber for the wedding night. The parable teaches the need for readiness. We know neither the day nor hour, therefore we must persevere in watchfulness and be ready whenever the time.

There is an urgency about the message and demands of the kingdom. "It is later than you think." The modern-day parable is told of Satan taking counsel with other evil spirits concerning

the best way to frustrate God's plans. One evil spirit said, "I will go and tell people that there is no heaven." Another evil spirit said, "I will go and tell people that there is no hell." A third evil spirit said, "I will go and tell people that there is no hurry." And Satan said to the last, "Go, for yours is the best way."

Jesus never says there is plenty of time to accept God's will. He never says, "Do it tomorrow." Satan is the one who says, "There's no hurry." Jesus' teaching is that we must be prepared and that we must be steadfast.

Applications

Jesus' teachings about the nature of the kingdom and the demands it makes are a special warning to church members. Much of Jesus' message was delivered in rebuke to the religious people of his time. Especially meaningful is the parable in Matthew 25:14-30 concerning the responsibilities of a man's slaves. Those slaves entrusted with five and two talents of money doubled the money for their master. The slave with one talent hid it so it would not be lost, but in failing to use what had been given to him had even that taken from him. Jesus says to us that we must use what God has given to us, that we must not hide what God has given us, namely the power and righteousness of his kingdom.

Jesus' teachings are a message, in fact, to everyone. To all he says that we should follow God's design for our lives.

Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Jesus says to build one's life on the rock, on Jesus himself and his words. The storms of life will come. The rains will fall, the winds will blow, the streams will rise; only what is done for Jesus will last. The difference between the disciple and the non-disciple is not in the crises of life but in the foundation on which life is built.

It is time to reaffirm that the way in which a person reacts to Jesus in the present age will determine the verdict to be given on his life in the next age (Matthew 10:32f.).

Faithfulness to Jesus and the kingdom of God requires endurance of persecution. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). Possession of the kingdom of God demands triumph over persecution. In view of the opposition which the message of the rule of God calls forth persecution is to be expected. If the persecution is indeed because of righteousness, then one is blessed with the reign of God prevailing in his life.

Chapter 7

Review Questions

1. How is the kingdom like seed or yeast?
2. How is the power of the kingdom shown?
3. Explain the idea of the kingdom as a gift from God.
4. Is God gracious and generous? How do we treat his gifts?
5. How valuable is the kingdom?
6. What did the men in the parables of the treasure in the field and of the merchant have in common? How were they different?
7. What does the kingdom of God have to do with our sins?
8. How is human forgiveness related to God's forgiveness?
9. What response does the kingdom of God demand?
10. Read Matthew 25:14-30. What is its message to us?
11. What is the Christian's firm foundation?
12. How should the Christian react to persecution?

Chapter 8

THE ROYAL FAMILY

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9f.)

Christians are here declared to be God's special people. They have a priestly status. They are royalty.

Countries which have a monarchy, such as Great Britain and the Netherlands, have a royal family, the family of the reigning king or queen. God and his Son Jesus Christ have a family, the royal family, the church. "You may know how one ought to behave in the household [family] of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15). "Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful over God's house [family] as a son. And we are his house [family] if we hold fast our confidence" (Hebrews 3:5f.). God is King, and Christians are children of the King. "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith" (Galatians 3:26). Christ is Son of God by nature; Christians are children of God by adoption. When in Christ they have his nature, the status of sonship. Jesus as Son of God exercises the kingship now. And he counts those who are in the church as his brethren. "For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, 'I will proclaim thy name

to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [church] I will praise thee' ” (Hebrews 2:11). The church is the family of the King, a royal family.

King Jesus

It is important to affirm that Jesus is king now. As seen in Chapters 3 and 5, the kingdom was inseparably linked with his person. Jesus is the viceregent (a person appointed to perform functions of a king) of God. He exercises God's kingship now. God in Old Testament times delegated the kingship to the human kings of Israel. A much more complete delegation of his kingly power was made to Jesus. The full authority of God is administered through Christ. After his resurrection Jesus was given the kingly authority of God.

The resurrected Christ, before his return to his Father in heaven, declared, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). That does not leave any authority outside its scope, nor does it leave any authority to be acquired or exercised in the future. The only omission is in the human recognition or acceptance of that authority. Hence, the command in the following verses to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:19f.). Another important declaration concerning the present lordship and rule of Jesus Christ is found in Ephesians 1:19-23:

... according to the working of [God's] great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body.

It would be difficult to imagine a more comprehensive statement of kingship than this. The kingly power of God raised Jesus from the dead. At that time he began his heavenly reign seated at God's right hand. He presides over all kingdoms — all rule,

authority, power, dominion; all things are under his feet. No title is superior to his. This rule pertains not only to this age but also to the age to come. There is no accession of kingship to be expected, for none is lacking now. Complete authority and kingship belong to Christ now. The statements of both Jesus and Paul place this possession of royal prerogatives in the context of the resurrection.

Peter's sermon at the birthday of the church in Acts 2:22-36 also connects the resurrection of Jesus with his assuming the throne of King David in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Peter quotes Psalms 16:8-11 and 110:1 as words of David spoken concerning Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven. His application of the quotations is that Christ is reigning as king now on the throne of David. The method of interpretation employed in the sermon is not of concern here; the point to be noticed is the conclusion drawn from the Old Testament text and the doctrine expounded. Peter's speech, as did Ephesians 1:19ff., speaks of Jesus now at the right hand of God following his resurrection and ascension. The resurrected Jesus sits on the throne of David in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. At his ascension he occupied the throne and so began his reign. Notice especially verses 30f. David was a prophet and knew God would set one of his descendants upon his throne. It was on that basis that he predicted the resurrection of Christ. "Knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne [cf. Ps. 132:11f.], he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ." The resurrection was the occasion when God set Jesus, son of David, on David's throne to begin an everlasting reign. This "kingship without end" (cf. Luke 1:33) is a present reign. Christ is ruling now. That is why his people form a royal family.

We must not underestimate the woe that must follow whenever people reject Christ's kingship. There have always been people who reject him, either disbelieving the evidence (of scripture and of his mighty works) or believing it but rebelling. Jewish leaders took Jesus' declaration of kingship (as the Son of God) to be blasphemy, and engineered his execution. At the crucifixion, the chief priest even protested Pilate's sign declaring Jesus king of the Jews (John 19:19-21). Soldiers and onlookers mocked

Jesus with the title of king. Six centuries later, Muhammad rejected Jesus' kingship in founding Islam. Even though the Koran (the Muslims' holy book) calls Jesus the *Word of God*, it treats him only as one prophet in a series from God. The Bahai Faith, founded in 1863 in what is now Iraq, treats Jesus the same way. Mormonism erodes Jesus' authority by adding the testimony of supposed "latter-day saints" to his words and releasing new prophecies from its leaders. Liberal scholars searching for "the historical Jesus" reduce him from king to mere teacher and core of a legend. One modern Jewish scholar even accepts Jesus' resurrection while denying him kingship as the Messiah (Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*).

These examples from Jesus' day to ours show humanity's remarkable stubbornness. Fallen human nature wants its kings — including its religious deities — made to order. This is why so many false gods and false prophets embody ruthlessness, deceit, false intellectuality, or sexual indulgence. Fallen humanity keeps crowning representations of itself, not acknowledging Christ for the crown he already wears. Christ is king, but "the ruler of this world" is Satan (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Those who want some king other than Christ, or no king at all, should be warned by Colossians 2:8. "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ."

Let's return to the positive side of our study. Those who do choose Jesus as king have a security and purpose that outsiders cannot know. Collectively, Christ's people are the church. Our study of the kingdom of God brings us now to the relation of the church and the kingdom. Previous chapters have stressed the primary meaning of the word kingdom — kingship or reign. God's kingdom is now expressed through Jesus Christ. It is time now to look at the secondary meaning of "realm," those over whom the rule is exercised. The subjects of King Jesus, the church, form the kingdom of God in its secondary sense.

Disciples and the Kingdom

Already during the ministry of Jesus his disciples were associated in certain sayings with the kingdom. Luke 12:32 has

been referred to several times for its teaching that the kingdom is God's gift. It is time to underscore to whom the gift is given. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The kingdom belongs to Jesus' "little flock," the company of his disciples, who as sheep followed their royal Shepherd. Whether "kingdom" here is to be understood as kingship or realm, either way it belongs to Jesus' disciples. Of course, if the idea is realm, then the point is already made that the disciples are the people (or subjects) of God's rule, but for now, the simple association of the disciples with the kingdom (in whatever sense) is significant. Another passage in Luke connects the kingdom more particularly with the twelve: "As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29f.). Here the idea seems to be "kingship." Jesus covenanted (promised) a royal position to his closest followers, even as the Father had covenanted a kingdom to him. They would be associated with Jesus in his royal prerogatives, eating at his table and exercising judicial functions over the people of God. The New Testament assigns to the twelve (and Paul) a special place as ambassadors of the King in making known his will to men (Matthew 19:28; John 20:22f.; Acts 1:8).

Jesus wants all to become members of his royal family. "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:26-29). The believer is united to Christ and thus to God's family by baptism. Faith is the reason why one is a child of God. The time at which one is placed in the royal family is at baptism. In baptism one puts on Christ. The person who is in Christ has Christ's nature, the nature of divine sonship. He is incorporated into Christ and so into God's people.

May we all submit to the rule of God. Then we will enjoy the privileges and blessings of God's royal family!

Chapter 8

Review Questions

1. How does one become a part of God's family today?
2. As a child of the King, how should the Christian view himself or herself, and how should he act?
3. Is Jesus king now? With what event is that kingship associated?
4. What passages declare the present lordship of Jesus?
5. Read Acts 2:22-36. How does Peter connect David's kingship with Jesus?
6. What are some ways people reject the kingship of Jesus?
7. Over whom is the kingship of Jesus exercised now?
8. How is realm related to reign? Where does the royal family fit in?
9. Name some passages which associate the disciples with the kingdom.
10. What place did the Twelve have in the kingdom?

Chapter 9

THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

Since there has often been confusion about the relation of the church and the kingdom, it is important to seek a clearer understanding on this matter. Some have identified the church and the kingdom; others have said there is no connection and the two are completely different. Neither position expresses exactly the biblical teaching. In this chapter we will examine passages which relate the church to the kingdom and passages which relate Christians to the kingdom and then seek a more precise way of stating the relationship.

Church and Kingdom.

Several passages closely relate the church and the kingdom. One should be careful about saying that the church and the kingdom are identical, but they certainly are in places in close association. In response to Peter's confession that "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus said, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18f.). Jesus promised to build his church and promised to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. There is no indication of a change in topic. The church and kingdom of heaven must be related in some significant way.

Perhaps some indication of the relation of the church and the kingdom in this passage may be found by exploring further the phrase "keys of the kingdom of heaven." "Keys" in Biblical

language give access to a realm. Some have seen in Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:19 a conferring of special authority on Peter; rather there is the assigning of a special function to him. Any authority associated with "keys" in Biblical terminology is secondary to the function of giving or controlling access to something. Matthew 23:13 gives Jesus' woe on the "Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in." The Lukan version is very instructive for the significance of "keys": "Woe to you lawyers! for you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering" (Luke 11:52). The key gave entry. It made possible opening and shutting the door. The person with the key could go in and could allow or hinder others to go in. Another demonstration of the significance of possession of the keys in Biblical language is found in the book of Revelation. Quite explicit are Jesus' words in Revelation 3:7, "The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens" (cf. Isaiah 22:22). The person with the keys opens and shuts. The resurrected Jesus furthermore declared, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17f.). A former chaplain at San Quentin prison tells of his experiences there which offer a good illustration of Jesus' words. He speaks of his feelings as a guard would open door after door as he was allowed to enter various cells to visit prisoners. As the doors would close behind him and the guard, the clanging of the huge metal doors would echo down the empty corridors of the prison. It was a frightening experience to hear those hollow sounds and realize where he was. But there was a comforting thought as the doors closed behind him and he walked down the barren corridors: the man with the keys was going with him. He makes the application, "as I face death and approach the gates of Hades, there is an assurance: 'the Man with the keys' goes with me."

The conferring of the keys on Peter in Matthew 16:19 gave him the responsibility of opening and shutting. Thus the promise of the keys is parallel to the promise of binding and loosing.

The latter terminology was used in Rabbinic literature to refer to authority to judge in regard to the law, to make interpretations or judicial decisions which bound or loosed. Specifically, this involved determining guilt or innocence, binding or loosing in regard to transgressions of the law. The same terminology is used in regard to forgiving sins in Matthew 18:18 (cf. John 20:23). Peter's power of the keys, therefore, would seem to be related to declaring the terms of pardon, a privilege which he exercised in preaching to Jews in Acts 2:38 and to Gentiles in Acts 10:47f. Peter preached the message of forgiveness of sins. In doing so he exercised the power of the keys which opened the way to forgiveness and gave entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The gospel of salvation announces access to the kingdom of God. The corollary is that those who reject the message remain in their sins and are shut out of the kingdom. The kingdom was the realm to which Peter gave entry. That kingdom is also the church, for those who received the remission of their sins were also added to the church (Acts 2:47).

The book of Revelation provides another context where the church and the kingdom are brought into very close association. John addressed "the seven churches that are in Asia" (Revelation 1:4). To these churches John says that Christ "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (Revelation 1:6). He further states, "I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 1:9). The churches, according to the combination of these statements, were made a kingdom; and John shared with them a kingdom. He was writing in a time of persecution on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Therefore to those who were sharing tribulation he gave the reminder that they also shared the kingship, the true royal position. This would make it possible for them to endure patiently their trials.

A third passage which brings the church into close relationship with the kingdom occurs in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The readers are said to have come "to the assembly [church] of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23).

Christians are referred to as “first-born ones” because of the guarantee that they will share in the resurrection; as Jesus is “the first-born from the dead” (Colossians 1:18), so his people are called first-born ones with reference to their resurrection, which will unite them with the heavenly choir of angels and the spirits of all just men. The exhortation based on the blessings received and the warnings issued is, “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28). Those who have come to the church have received an unshakeable kingdom. The final resurrection and assembly of the saints will give them a royal status in the heavenly Jerusalem. That status is shared now by anticipation and so gives an assurance in the presence of the awesome nature of God.

Although there is an area of overlap between the kingdom and the church, even in these passages (and certainly not in others) one cannot simply substitute “church” where “kingdom” occurs in the New Testament text. The church is a manifestation of the kingdom, but the kingdom is not exhausted by the church. The kingdom is more than the church, although the church will ultimately be caught up into the kingdom. The passages where the kingdom seems to refer to the church may be seen as representing the secondary sense of kingdom as a realm. Even these passages just considered, however, may keep the primary sense of reign. Through its association with Christ, being “in Jesus” (Revelation 1:9), the church shares in some sense in his kingly qualities. Even so, members of the church, Christians, are brought into a significant relationship with the kingdom.

Christians and the Kingdom

Christians are in the kingdom now. There is a present kingdom during the Christian age, and Christians are already in this kingdom.

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:11-14)

The same divine power which raised Jesus from the dead is available to Christians (Ephesians 1:19f.). That power strengthens the believer. He is given assurance because he shares in the inheritance of God's people. In Christ there is redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Those who have received the forgiveness of sins, who share the heavenly inheritance, who are strengthened with God's glorious might, are in the kingdom of Christ. They are under the dominion of Christ and not of Satan. As seen earlier, Satan has a kingdom (Matthew 12:26). It is the realm of darkness. Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of light. There are only two kingdoms, spiritually speaking, in which one may dwell — the kingdoms of darkness and of light. Christ is reigning as king from the right hand of God in the present. The Christian has come under his sovereignty. Christ rules his life, not Satan.

The significance of the ministry of Jesus was presented in Chapter 4 as a victory which Jesus won over the demonic forces. Jesus' power was demonstrated in his miracles, especially the casting out of demons. The epistles of the New Testament connect this victory preeminently with the death and resurrection. A passage later in Colossians uses military imagery to develop the significance of the cross as a victory over the evil powers. Colossians 2:15 is part of a passage with significant difficulties for detailed exegesis. The Revised Standard Version translates, "He [God] disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him" (or "in it," that is, the cross, according to the footnote). The various possibilities in interpreting the details do not affect the principal point of importance for the present discussion. The evil spirits have been defeated. The cross and resurrection of Jesus were God acting in a new and decisive way in expressing his royal rule over his creation. The victory was won by means of Christ. He is victorious. That is why the person who is in Christ has been delivered from the kingdom of darkness. He shares the victory won through Christ over the powers that oppose God and condemn God's people.

Christians, the church, may be said to represent the realm of the kingdom now. Realm, however, is the secondary meaning of kingdom. Colossians 1:13 maintains the primary sense of reign. Christians have come under the kingship of God's royal Son.

Relation of Church and Kingdom

There have been various ways in which the relation of church and kingdom in its primary sense has been expressed. The church is the present manifestation of the kingdom of God. The church is the bearer of the kingdom of God now. The kingdom creates the church. The kingdom reaches down and comes to expression in the church. All of these statements are accurate, but the way I prefer to express the relationship of the church to the kingdom is to say that the church is the people who accept the rule or kingdom of God. The church is the people of the kingdom. Christians are those who have entered the kingdom of God. Or better, they are those who have been transferred into the kingdom, for God places them there. The church is not the kingdom itself in the primary meaning of kingdom, but in the secondary sense of a realm the church is the kingdom now.

If we ever grow complacent about the church — if we treat it as an entitlement instead of a blessing — we need to consider our bond with the Head of that church, Jesus Christ. Our allegiance to him is what gives us identity and confidence in this world as well as salvation in the next. In Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King*, Sir Bedivere represents a follower who is about to lose his leader. As King Arthur lies gravely wounded, Bedivere is in anguish:

Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go? . . . now the
whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world, and I, the last,
go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years. . . .

Tennyson could have had in mind the disciples' confusion and grief after Jesus' crucifixion. While they lacked their leader, they were nothing. When they regained him after his resurrection, their joy and courage were boundless. In our age of skepticism and anti-heroes, we must not forget that the *leaderless* person is the weak one. Clinging to Jesus as our king is our one security.

God's sovereignty is more fully realized now that Christ has come, been killed, been raised, and has poured out the Holy Spirit. Those who believe and obey Christ have been delivered from the realm of darkness. Their sins have been forgiven, and they have been placed in the family of God.

Chapter 9

Review Questions

1. Cite passages which closely associate the kingdom and the church.
2. What is the significance of “keys” in Biblical language?
3. How did Peter exercise the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19)?
4. What assurance is given to Christians by Jesus’ possession of the “keys of Death and Hades” (Revelation 1:17f.)?
5. What did John share with those to whom he wrote (Revelation 1:9)?
6. Who are the “first-born” of Hebrews 12:23?
7. Are Christians in the kingdom now?
8. Does Satan have any power over Christians?
9. State different ways to describe the relation of church and kingdom.
10. Which of these descriptions does the job best? Do you agree with the author’s own choice?

Chapter 10

KINGDOM ACTIVITIES

The Biblical teaching on the kingdom which has been studied in this series of lessons gives special meaning to some of the activities in the church. The relation of these activities to the theme of the kingdom will now be considered.

Prayer

Prayer has as one of its concerns the kingdom of God. The teaching about the kingdom gives special meaning to the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9f.)

As was discussed in Chapter 6, the three central petitions are equivalent expressions. A literal translation to bring out the parallelism might read: "Be hallowed thy name; come thy kingdom; be done thy will." God's name is truly sanctified when his rule is accomplished. His kingdom comes to realization when his will is done. The phrase "on earth as it is in heaven" modifies all three petitions. The prayer is for the kingship of God to be consummated on earth even as it is in heaven.

The disciple prays for the rule of God to come more fully into his own life and to come into the lives of others. He also prays for the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom when Jesus comes again, a dimension of the kingdom to be considered in

the following chapters. Although the petition might sound strange in many churches today, the early Christians prayed for the return of Jesus (1 Corinthians 16:22 — *Maranatha*, “Our Lord, come”; Revelation 22:20). And the Christian prays especially for the kingdom to come more fully on earth, for the rule of God to be realized in this world, although he realizes that the complete fulfillment of the kingdom of God is possible only in heaven. A few have said that Christians today cannot pray this prayer which Jesus taught his disciples. Since the church has come, the kingdom has come, and so the prayer is no longer relevant as it was during the days of Jesus’ ministry. On the other hand, the church is the kingdom only in the sense of realm and does not exhaust the meaning of kingdom. The instincts of most Christians through the ages to take this model prayer as a continuing guide to their prayer life has been correct. The kingdom or rule of God should remain a central theme and concern of prayer, both privately and in church.

Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s supper is another activity in the church which has a special relation to the kingdom. The first three Gospels record a saying of Jesus in connection with the institution of the Lord’s supper which is relevant here.

I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom. (Matthew 26:29)

Truly, I say to you I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God. (Mark 14:25)

And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” (Luke 22:15-18)

The Matthean and Markan statements, which are essentially the same, sound more like the eschatological kingdom. The

Lukan version makes one think of a more immediate development, as in the Christian age. Whichever was in Jesus' mind, if they were even sharply distinguished, there is a close connection between the repetition of the Lord's supper in the church and the eschatological banquet of the redeemed in the age to come. The Lord's supper is an anticipation and guarantee of God's eschatological kingdom, the eternal kingdom at the end of the ages. The Lord's supper is observed with the forward look "until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The blessings of the time of his coming are described in terms of a feast (Matthew 8:11; Revelation 19:9). Even as Jesus in his last supper with his disciples was concerned with the kingdom of God and doing the will of his Father, so the bread and fruit of the vine of the Lord's supper are taken in the church with reference to the fulfillment of the kingdom of God.

Preaching

The preaching task of the church finds its motivation, content, and goal in the kingdom of God. To preach the gospel is to preach the kingdom. To preach the kingdom is Luke's way to describe the preaching of the gospel. "But when they [Samaritans] believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:11). "And he [Paul] entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). "And now, behold, I [Paul] know that all you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will see my face no more" (Acts 20:25). "And when they [Jews in Rome] appointed a day for him [Paul], . . . he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets" (Acts 28:23). "And he [Paul] . . . welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered" (Acts 28:31). Notice that these passages connect the kingdom with Jesus Christ. The rule of God is now associated with the saving work of Christ. It is the mission of the church to proclaim this. The rule of God empowers the church for this task. Just as Jesus preached the kingdom (Mark 1:14f.), the church continues his ministry by

proclaiming God's kingdom. The church now knows more about how the kingdom expresses itself than was revealed during Jesus' ministry. The church knows the saving work of God through the death and resurrection of God's agent. Therefore, the church has more to say about the kingdom and how God has acted than Jesus was able openly to proclaim. The central theme and purpose of its message is, however, the same. Only the specific details are richer, and how the kingdom is associated with Jesus is now clearer.

The preaching of the gospel of Christ brings about the overthrow of Satan. Thus it contributes to the accomplishment of the goal of the kingdom of God.

After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way. . . . Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' . . . He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:1-20)

The seventy disciples preached the message of the kingdom, even as did Jesus; and they successfully cast out demons as he did. Jesus saw this as an indication of the fall of Satan from heaven. Probably the vision of Satan's fall is to be understood symbolically. At any rate, it seems to be proleptic, a prevision of the effects of Jesus' death and resurrection (John 12:31f.). Preaching the Gospel is the way to extend the victory Christ won at

the cross to the lives of individuals. The individual appropriation of the benefits of Christ's victory still remains dependent on Jesus' death and resurrection and the proclamation of his message.

Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. (Revelation 12:10f.)

Where the Gospel is preached and believed, the power of Satan is broken. We ought to remind one another more often that preaching is part of a cosmic victory. A sermon is more than a lecture-of-the-week, and paying attention to it is not just some dull duty. Speech is power! In a totalitarian state, control of the media and of public speech is enforced ruthlessly. When we are tempted to take preaching lightly, we should think on the string of Soviet prisons nicknamed the "Gulag archipelago," where thousands have suffered or perished for their speaking or writing.

Enemies of religion and godly liberty spend more money and energy to suppress preaching in some countries than God's people spend to support it. This is ironic because God's people should know the true stakes: not just political control of a given country but spiritual control of billions of souls around the planet. Until Satan's final defeat, the battle goes on soul by soul. Even the briefest prayer is a rifle round fired at Satan; the sharing of the Lord's supper among even a few Christians is a massed demonstration against Satan; preaching is an aerial bombardment. In this perspective, no activity of the church is just a dull duty, no preacher or missionary is a mere employee, no eldership is a mere audience. Complacency and habit may do worse than leave us bored with the church. They can make us slackers, dragging against a great cause.

Basis of Activity

The church is the present manifestation of the kingdom. Yet the kingdom present in the church awaits consummation. There is still a future manifestation of the kingdom, so the next chapters will consider the kingdom and the future.

The kingdom for us, as for Jesus, has both a present and a future aspect. We stand farther along in God's history of salvation than those who lived before the cross and resurrection, but there is still not a full completion of God's plans as yet.

The rule of God comes to a person when Jesus forgives sins. God's royal power works for salvation. Jesus manifests his kingly power in forgiveness.

And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — he said to the paralytic — "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!" (Mark 2:2-12)

Jesus has the authority of God to forgive sins, and he demonstrated his power in his healing miracles. They were performed not for their own sakes, however, but as demonstrations of the kingdom of God. Jesus gives new life, eternal life. He breaks the power of Satan and his hold on human life now. Colossians 1:13f. connected being under the kingship of Christ with receiving redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Thus there is a real present power of the kingdom available to believers.

Whenever sins are forgiven, one comes under the rule of God. The energies of the person whose sins are forgiven are then released for worthwhile purposes. He no longer engages in destructive activities, but he is free to perform kingdom activities.

Chapter 10

Review Questions

1. Explain the structure of the first five lines of the Lord's prayer.
2. What are different ways, consistent with Biblical teaching, in which the petition "Thy kingdom come" may be understood?
3. Can you pray for the return of Jesus with confidence? What needs to be set right with your life and attitudes so that you can?
4. At the last supper, what reference did Jesus make to the kingdom?
5. What image of the heavenly world is connected with the Lord's supper?
6. What is the significance of preaching "the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ"?
7. How does the preaching of the gospel affect the kingdom of Satan? What then should be our attitude toward preaching?
8. If the kingdom remains both present and future for us, in what respect do we have an advantage (so far as the kingdom is concerned) over those who heard Jesus teach?
9. How does Jesus use his kingly power in relation to human sin? How did Jesus demonstrate his power to forgive sin?
10. Relate the forgiveness of sins to the power to perform the work of the kingdom.

Chapter 11

THE KINGSHIP OF JESUS

A popular view today expects Jesus to return soon and rule on the earth for a thousand years. This view makes Jesus' kingship primarily future and makes his future kingdom earthly. This doctrine, known as pre-millennialism, says that when Jesus returns he will occupy the throne of David and will rule for one thousand years (the millennium) on earth from Jerusalem. Such teaching is not consistent with much Biblical teaching. This chapter will explore the Biblical teaching about the present kingship of Jesus and its relation to the rule of God and his future kingdom. The next chapter will examine the concept of the millennium.

It is certainly taught in the Bible that Jesus would occupy the throne of David and rule. Before his birth the angel promised Mary as follows:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.
He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High;
and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.
and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever;
and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:31-33)

Jesus was "son of David" according to fleshly descent (Romans 1:3). The promises to David of a descendant to occupy his throne are fulfilled in Christ. The basic promise came through the prophet Nathan to David:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth 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 for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

The promise was repeated and referred to at other times in the Old Testament. For example, Psalms 132:11,

The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies which I shall teach them, their sons also for ever shall sit upon your throne."

That succession came to an end with Christ, for he fulfilled the promises to David. The throne of his kingdom is everlasting.

The kingdoms of mortal men come to an end. The kingdom of David went many centuries without someone to wield the royal scepter. Human kings die. But of Jesus' kingdom "there will be no end" (Luke 1:33). That means that death will have no power over him. His kingship is based on the power of an everlasting life. (The same is said concerning his priesthood in Hebrews 7:16, 24.)

The Beginning of His Kingship

When began that kingdom of which the prophets and angel spoke? There is no question about the Biblical teaching that Jesus is son of David and so King. Moreover, according to his divine nature he has an eternal kingship. But when did he enter into the specific exercise of his Davidic kingship? The preceding paragraph points to the answer. He entered into his kingship on the throne of David at his resurrection. We may be reminded of some passages quoted in Chapter 8. According to Acts 2:22-32, especially verses 30-31, it was on the basis of God's promise to "set one of his descendants upon his throne" that David was able to predict "the resurrection of the Christ." The conclusion is obvious that the promise was fulfilled in the resurrection. It was the resurrection that enabled Jesus to assume an everlasting kingship. The resurrected Jesus occupied the

throne of David. God's oath to set one on David's throne, Peter says, was fulfilled in the resurrection. And the royal Christ described in Revelation 1 says the same: "I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17f.).

Other passages affirm that Jesus rules now. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). God by raising him from the dead and exalting him to his right hand in heaven placed all other authority and power and dominion in subjection under his rule (Ephesians 1:20-22).

Jesus occupies the throne of David now. All authority is his. God has put all things under his feet.

The Kingship Surrendered

When Christ comes again, therefore, it will not be to assume a kingly position, or to set up a kingdom. He is king now, and he has a kingdom now of which Christians are a part. When Christ comes again, rather than setting up a kingdom, he will deliver back to God an already existing kingdom. The advocates of an earthly kingdom have not only given the kingdom a wrong place (earth instead of heaven) and time (return from heaven rather than ascent to heaven), but they have also misunderstood the purpose of the second coming in relation to the kingdom.

A precise sequence of events is laid out in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection under him," it is plain that he is

excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

Paul is arguing for the general resurrection, which some at Corinth denied (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). The resurrection of Christ was the first fruits of the resurrection. As the first fruits of the harvest is of the same kind as the remainder of the harvest and is a guarantee of the coming completion of the harvest, so the resurrection of Christ assures that his people will have a resurrection like his. Christ's resurrection was first; next will be the resurrection of those who belong to Christ (vs. 23). The lack of reference in this passage to those who do not belong to Christ does not affect the interpretation, for non-Christians are not under consideration. The resurrection of those in Christ will occur "at his coming" (vs. 23).

"Then comes the end" (vs. 24a). No intervening events between "his coming" and "the end" are allowed for in this passage. Earthly history is at an end. The resurrection "at his coming" is the final consummation of human history in this world. This "end" does not allow for the setting up of an earthly kingdom or the inaugurating of a new period in God's dealings with humanity. No, rather than the start of a kingdom, or a new phase in Christ's kingdom, the resurrection at his coming is the end of Christ's kingdom as far as this world is concerned. At this "end," "at his coming," "he delivers the kingdom to God the Father" (vs. 24b). The kingship is returned to God who bestowed it on the resurrected Christ. What was given at the resurrection of Jesus, at the resurrection of those who belong to him will be restored to God the Father.

That restoration of the kingship to God is possible because of the destruction of all of God's enemies and the complete subjection of everything to Christ. The return of the kingdom to God occurs "after destroying every rule and every authority and power" (vs. 24c). Those same words occur in Ephesians 1:21 to encompass all that is subjected to the resurrected Christ. Other sovereignties were placed under his feet at his resurrection. At his coming again they will be totally destroyed. Those powers

already subjected to Christ will be finally abolished at his coming. "Rule, authority, and power" are words for his "enemies," powers which are opposed to his benevolent rule. The destruction of those enemy forces will occur at Jesus' second coming, not at some time far in the future after it. With all the enemies destroyed Jesus delivers the kingdom back to God.

Jesus is reigning now. So affirms this passage, as do the others previously cited. "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (vs. 25). "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (vs. 26). When is death destroyed? At the resurrection, of course. When does the resurrection occur? "At his coming" (vs. 23). The general resurrection of those "who belong to Christ" is the final victory over death. Death does not have the last word. The victory belongs to life. And the transformation from death to resurrected life will occur "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:51-57). But note that death is "the last enemy to be destroyed" (vs. 26). If Jesus is reigning *until* all his enemies are subjected to him, and the last enemy to be overcome is death, then the reign of Christ comes to an end at the time of the general resurrection. The reign of Christ does not begin at the resurrection which is "at his coming"; his reign concludes at that time. Christ, having abolished death as the last of all the enemy powers opposed to his rule, will surrender his kingship to God the Father. There is no place for an intermediate earthly kingdom of one thousand years, or of any length for that matter. The scheme of 1 Corinthians 15 in fact precludes any such development.

The quotation in verse 27 is taken from Psalms 8:6. The statement in the Psalms refers to the lordship of mankind over God's creation. Jesus as man — the perfect, ideal, and representative human being — accomplishes what God intended for humanity, namely to rule over God's creation (Genesis 1:26-30). But, of course, God the creator is not subjected to this rule. He is the one who accomplishes the submission of all things to his viceregent (vs. 27). When the Son is subjected to God, the kingdom will be once more God's and will exist forever.

The statements of 1 Corinthians 15 about Christ delivering the kingdom back to God (vs. 24), ceasing to reign after the resurrection (vss. 25f.), and being subjected to the Father (vs. 28)

might seem to contradict the promise of Luke 1:33 that his kingdom would have no end. The apparent contradiction has caused no little controversy through the ages. One solution is to understand Luke 1:33 in a relative and not an absolute sense. This has a precedent in Old Testament language that speaks of various things as “everlasting” or “forever” when they were very long lasting (e.g. the priesthood — Exodus 40:15; possession of the land — Joshua 14:9; temple — 1 Kings 9:3). The promise of the never-ending kingship to Jesus alludes to similar statements about the Davidic kingship lasting forever (2 Samuel 7:13-16; 1 Chronicles 17:12-14), when historically speaking that kingship had already been vacant for centuries when Jesus was born.

Perhaps a simpler solution to the apparent contradiction between Luke 1:33 and 1 Corinthians 15:24 is to be found in following the clue suggested by the subsequent statement in 1 Corinthians 15:27, which speaks of the Son in words from Psalms 8. The “Son” in 1 Corinthians 15:28 is to be thought of in his nature as “Son of man,” the perfect human being. The kingship according to his humanity, the dominion over God’s creation, comes to an end with the end of the present created order of existence. The dominion as exercised by man is swallowed up in the heavenly order of existence. Christ as Son of man and son of David is no longer king. Of course, in his divine nature, as one with God, he continues to share the eternal sovereignty of God.

The Unbelievers

Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians (and all other affirmations of the present kingship of Jesus) imply a warning to those who do not accept him as King. Much more serious than the issues of when Jesus became King or what he will do in relation to the kingdom when he comes again is the fact of his kingship. What will you do with Jesus? Are you among those who own him as Lord or among those who reject him?

In the final chapter of our study, we will examine the way Christians partake now of privileges belonging to the future kingdom. That God overlaps the present and the future of his kingdom is as comforting as it is marvelous. How strange it is, then, that so many people are indifferent to the present *or* the future of God’s works. We have mentioned religious people who

insist that Jesus' reign is future, physical, and earthly. Many nonreligious people would prefer that there be no reign at all.

Think of Alexander the Great when his empire was at its greatest extent. Somewhere in the provinces there would always be the shepherd, farmer, or local chieftain who did not *care* that Alexander was emperor, who only wanted to be left alone to do as he pleased! Occasionally a whole nation shows this refusal to submit to any ruler. In the time of the Judges, for example, "every man did what was right in his own eyes" in Israel (Judges 17:6; 21:25), and God's deputies had a hard time establishing any justice at all.

There are two benefits in thinking for a moment of those who prefer no king and no kingdom. One is to avoid discouragement in evangelism. When some stout individualist sneers at the gospel, we should not feel guilty at not converting him. It is the gospel, not we, that brings about conversion; it is the rebel himself, not we, who is responsible for refusing the gospel. Another benefit of considering this person is to put ourselves on guard against becoming like him. The cult of individuality is strong in our century. It can erode our allegiance to heaven's king if we let it.

Chapter 11

Review Questions

1. Does the Bible teach that Jesus would rule from the throne of David?
Cite passages on which you base your answer.
2. How long will Jesus' kingdom endure?
3. When did Jesus enter into his Davidic kingship?
4. Cite passages which affirm that Jesus rules now.
5. When Jesus comes again, will he set up a kingdom or surrender an already existing kingdom?
6. In what ways do advocates of an earthly millennial kingdom misunderstand the Biblical teachings?
7. Give an exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. Does this passage allow for an intermediate millennial kingdom? How does it exclude such an idea?
8. What will be destroyed at Christ's second coming?
9. What does 1 Corinthians 15:28 say about God as king?
10. How may Luke 1:33 and 1 Corinthians 15:24 be reconciled?
11. What are the consequences of the teaching in this lesson for unbelievers?
12. What should be our attitude and responsibility to those who do not recognize the kingship of Jesus?

Chapter 12

NOT OF THIS WORLD

Jesus at his trial before the Roman governor Pilate was asked concerning his kingship:

Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingship [kingdom] is not of this world; if my kingship [kingdom] were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship [kingdom] is not from the world." Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice." (John 18:33-37)

Jesus' kingship, his kingdom, is essentially "not of this world." It does not derive from the world nor does it primarily pertain to it. His kingdom is not of the here and now.

During his ministry many wanted to make Jesus' kingship political and earthly. The same Gospel according to John records the following in connection with Jesus' feeding of the multitudes: "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself" (John 6:15). From that time forward Jesus had to

beware of those who wanted to act forcibly on their political understanding of messiahship. There are still today many who want to locate Jesus' kingdom on earth. He himself has already rebuked such efforts and such interpretations. His kingship is spiritual, and his kingdom is ultimately not of this world.

Reigning a Thousand Years

Revelation 20:1-10 has been a principal support for those who have advocated an earthly reign of Christ following his second coming. Although it does not say anything about a reign on earth, it is the only passage in the Bible which speaks of a thousand year reign.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the

saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

There have been two main approaches to this passage. One approach understands the thousand years as literal, or at least as referring to a definite period of time. Within this approach there has been a difference about the relation of the second coming of Christ to the thousand years. The post-millennial interpretation understands the return of Christ to occur after the thousand years of spiritual blessedness on earth. The pre-millennial interpretation, much the more popular in the twentieth century, places the coming of Christ before the millennium and understands that event as inaugurating the thousand years of earthly bliss.

Another approach to Revelation 20 understands the thousand years as symbolic. Since the time of Augustine in the early fifth century the most popular non-millennial interpretation of the passage has understood the thousand years as representing the church age. The martyrs (vs. 4) are now reigning with Christ. A variant form of the non-literal reading of the thousand years understands this expression as referring to the perfection or thoroughness of the restraint imposed on Satan. All Christians as well as the martyrs are hereby included in verse 4.

The Book of Revelation

The careful exegesis of Revelation 20 has led a number of modern commentators to develop a somewhat different approach, which places the passage in the context of the book as a whole. Before noting these exegetical points, some preliminary observations should be made about the book of Revelation as a whole.

First, the very first verse of the book must be given its full force, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place" (Revelation 1:1). The Revelation concerns *what must soon take place*. It was a message to the servants of God at the close of the first century who were threatened with persecution. The primary concern was with those who suffered for their faith. The book

assured them that the persecution was worth it and the verdict of earthly magistrates would be reversed in a Higher Court. That does not mean the book has no message to Christians of later ages, but it does mean that the primary message was to those to whom the book was addressed and whatever message the book has to later generations must be based on and derived from what was intended for and intelligible to Christians at the time of its writing.

Second, as the first verse says, the book is a *revelation*. The Greek word is *apocalypse*. The book belongs to the category of apocalyptic literature, which was common in Judaism in the period surrounding the beginning of Christianity. Apocalyptic literature is highly symbolic. Numbers, for instance, have symbolic significance and are not to be taken literally. A highly symbolic passage such as Revelation 20 should not be interpreted to contradict plain, literal teaching found elsewhere in scripture.

Third, the revelation is of *Jesus Christ*. He is the theme of the book. Revelation concerns the victory of Christ over his enemies, a victory which he shares with his followers. Christ is "the living one," who holds "the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17f.). Therefore, he can say. "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). The defeat of the forces of evil is certain, present circumstances to the contrary notwithstanding. The devil, the beast, and the false prophet will be "thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone" (Revelation 20:10).

Fourth, the book of Revelation agrees with the rest of the New Testament that *the kingdom of Christ* began at his first coming in connection with his death and resurrection. As "firstborn from the dead" he is "the ruler of kings on earth" and so has made those freed from their sins by his blood into a kingdom (Revelation 1:5f.). It is in relation to his first coming that the declaration is made that "the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down" (Revelation 12:10; for the context see vss. 1-6).

Meaning of Revelation 20

Revelation 20 continues the theme of the constant rebellion of Satan and his repeated defeat by the divine forces (Revelation 12:7-9; 20:1; 20:8f.). The angels of God exercise Christ's control over death and Hades. The key determines access through the power of opening and shutting (cf. Revelation 9:1-6). Satan is bound and limited where the keys of Christ are exercised. This is not yet his final defeat. That will cast him into the lake of fire and brimstone (20:9f.) where were consigned the beast (the persecuting power of pagan Rome) and the false prophet (the pagan religion which supported the political power of the state) according to Revelation 19:20.

During the time of Satan's binding (20:2) there continued the nations who could be deceived by him and over whom those associated with Christ reigned. The privileges assigned to those who reign with Christ apply, in this passage, only to the martyrs (20:4). These privileges (20:4-6) repeat the statements found earlier in the book: kingdom and priests (1:6 — a present situation), reigning on the earth (5:10), with power over the nations to rule them with a rod of iron (2:26f.). The thrones of judgment recall the promise made to the saints in Daniel 7:22, 26f. Thus far the motifs are those found already in the study of the kingdom passages.

The new element, in addition to the thousand years, in Revelation 20 is the introduction of the "first resurrection." It should be emphasized again that this passage gives that privilege only to the martyrs. Consistent with the theme of Revelation that those who overcome in the time of persecution enjoy special privileges, this passage appears to say that these faithful witnesses "come to life" and share a resurrection life like that which Christ now enjoys (cf. 2:8; 3:21). They do not have to wait for the second coming as "the rest of the dead" do. They enter sooner into the presence of the royal Christ enthroned at God's right hand than do other believers (cf. 6:9-11; 7:9-17). This was their special privilege. Such an understanding that the martyrs went immediately to the presence of God without having to await the general resurrection was the common conviction of the early post-apostolic church, and that belief must have had its origin in such teaching as is found here in Revelation 20:4-6. There is no other possible Biblical source.

The second death is the eternal destruction which follows on the last judgment (20:14). The second resurrection is the general resurrection preceding that judgment. The reigning and judging performed by the martyrs is preliminary to the final judgment, which assigns all mankind to its eternal destiny. It may be a sharing in the rulership of Christ throughout the present age or a role in some of the particular vindications of God which occur in history. The thousand years thus becomes an indefinite but exceedingly long and certain period of spiritual triumph for those who have been faithful witnesses of Christ. The passage in Revelation 20 introduces some new teaching not found elsewhere, but provides further explication of a standpoint presented throughout the rest of the book, and a teaching consistent with the rest of the New Testament.

Application

The message of the book of Revelation is a word of hope to persecuted and suffering Christians. Revelation exhorts all God's people in every age to faithfulness, regardless of the external circumstances of life. Victory is assured to believers. Christ has already achieved the decisive defeat of Satan; and Satan's final overthrow is certain. Christ's people share in that victory and are assured of ultimate triumph, so much so that they share even now in the kingdom (kingship) of Christ. Especially do those who are persecuted and share in Christ's sufferings have an assurance of sharing in his victory.

The teaching of the book of Revelation agrees with the teaching of the rest of the Bible about the everlasting kingdom. God rules; Christ rules; Christians participate in the blessings of that rule. That gives courage, confidence, and hope for faithful living.

Chapter 12

Review Questions

1. What truth about his kingdom did Jesus affirm in his trial before Pilate?
2. What kind of king did people of Jesus' time want him to be? Is that desire still with us?
3. What is the only passage in the Bible which speaks of a thousand year reign?
4. Discuss the main approaches to the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10. Are you acquainted with other interpretations?
5. What is the difference between post-millennialism and pre-millennialism?
6. What characteristics of the book of Revelation are important for understanding Revelation 20?
7. Consult Bible dictionaries or encyclopedias for an explanation of apocalyptic literature.
8. What statements in Revelation 20:1-10 repeat statements earlier in the book? What is new in Revelation 20?
9. What indications are there that Revelation 20 is talking about the privileges of martyrs?
10. What does the book of Revelation have to say to us today?

Chapter 13

THE KINGDOM AND THE FUTURE

Earlier chapters considered the present dimension of the kingdom for Christians. Christians are now in the kingdom of Christ and under his dominion: God “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13). Christians are members of the royal family. This chapter will call attention to the future dimension of the kingdom for Christians. The kingdom is not only present but also future for us today. Paul expressed his confidence that “The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen” (2 Timothy 4:18). With these words he expressed the future, heavenly aspect of the kingdom. Similar language occurs in 2 Peter 1:11 as the hope of all Christians: “So there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” These verses speak of the future and heavenly dimension of the kingdom — “not of this world.”

Relation of Present and Future

The kingdom power of God is now available. The final victory over all God’s enemies will occur at the second coming of Christ. Nevertheless, the decisive battle was won at Jesus’ resurrection.

Hebrews 6:4-6 describes the blessings of believers.

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy

Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.

The reason given for the impossibility of renewing repentance in these apostates is that they have denied the only motives and influences which can bring about repentance. By holding the Son of God in contempt, they adopt the same attitude and approach as those who put him to death on the cross. The story of divine love in the cross is that which brings one to repentance (Romans 2:4). To reject it is to reject the basis of salvation. Furthermore, to turn one's back on the blessings of the new age is to reject the very power and goodness of God. The author is not denying to all apostates the possibility of repentance, but he is denying a return to a repentant attitude to those who reject the only things which will produce repentance. In describing their condition he gives an impressive list of the present blessings in Christ. The resurrection of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit — these are expressions of the fact that we now experience the blessings of the end-time. The powers of the age to come are available now. The eschatological blessings have begun now. The kingdom privileges are being experienced now.

Through Christ the end, or the beginning of the end, has come upon us. Tomorrow is here today. We can enter the new world now by entering the kingdom of God and Christ. Something of God's glory and power has reached down and called us to be children of the coming age. The kingdom of God has created a new people, the church. The future is present in Christ. An event of the past, the resurrection, has opened up the divine future and made something of its power and blessings available in the present.

Something of the continuity of the present with the future for the Christian is brought out in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. Paul was consoling the Thessalonian Christians concerning those of their number who had died before the coming of Christ. He has assured them in 4:13-18 that they will not miss out on the

eschatological blessings but will be raised to meet the Lord *in the air* (note well) at his second appearing (4:16f.). The Christian need not be anxious concerning this event as the unbeliever should be. The Lord's coming will be sudden and unexpected (5:1-3). The destruction of that time will be for those who live in darkness. Believers, however, are living in eager expectation of the return of their Lord (vs. 4). Their lives have the same character as their Lord's life, and their conduct and experiences will be in continuity with the new age. "For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). That day will be light; its character will be the same as the character already possessed by Christ's people. If they have known the Lord as gracious, they will know him as gracious when he appears. Those who live in darkness will find his coming a time of darkness for them (vs. 7). There is a certain kind of conduct that goes with being of the day (vss. 6,8). God has destined believers for salvation, and that is an encouraging word (vss. 9-11). The day of the Lord will be in continuity with life in the Lord lived here and now. The blessings will be richer, fuller, more personal; but the foretaste is already experienced when one comes under the lordship of Jesus.

Have you noticed what a difference that foretaste can make in a Christian's life? Some people are utterly sound in their doctrine and behavior but never seem to *enjoy* being Christians. Their conception of heaven emphasizes the negative: not the presence of health, just the absence of disease; not the fun of godly friendships, just the absence of enemies; not the thrill of being with the Lord, just the relief of being rid of the world. No wonder they're grim. No wonder they don't care about foretastes of heaven.

People who are thrilled to be Christians are delighted with any small samples of heaven that come to them, and they think about heaven a lot. Like successful athletes, they practice and they visualize. Worship, prayer, fellowship, and good deeds are practice for heaven, like an athlete's rehearsal of all the skills needed for the big event. And a Christian's daydreams about heaven are like athletes' "visualization," a vivid imagining of what they will do in a coming situation. Sports psychologists have taught divers, high jumpers, football players, and others

to visualize a successful performance over and over. The high jumper imagines clearing the bar by six inches, the diver imagines entering the water without a splash, and so on. When the real event comes, the athletes are confident and measurably *better* at what they do. Visualization works so well that it is now taught to salesmen, managers, students, and others who perform under pressure. Christians who visualize heaven are the happier for it.

Every Christian has had a little practice at dying and resurrection. That's baptism. Now we ought to practice *living* the way we will in heaven.

Sharing the Kingdom

Christians, through their union with Christ, in some sense share the kingship of Christ.

The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;
if we endure, we shall also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us. (2 Timothy 2:11f.)

Being joined with Christ bestows the nature of Christ upon a person. Baptism into Christ makes us children of God (Galatians 3:26f.). Not only Christ's sonship, but his royal position and functions in some sense are conferred upon his people. Union with his death brings also participation in his resurrection life. As that resurrection exalted him to the right hand of God to reign on David's throne, so the resurrection brings Christians to the heavenly status with him.

Sharing the royal status of Christ includes superiority over death. "If we have died with him, we shall also live with him" (2 Timothy 2:11). God is God of the living (Luke 20:38). Christ became king at his resurrection. The kingdom rules over death. Christ's lordship extends over the grave, and eventually the last enemy, death, will be brought under his sway (1 Corinthians 15:26). His people share that triumph over death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). As Christ is the "first-born from the dead" (Colossians 1:18), Christians are "first-born ones" in the assembly of those enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).

This sharing in Christ's reign includes some aspects which surpass comprehension. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for going before pagan law courts to settle their disputes and gave as a reason why they should settle matters among themselves the following consideration: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?" (1 Corinthians 6:2). I think of myself being judged by Christ, not joining with him in judging. But the statement is in line with the Old Testament predictions that the saints would be given the power of judgment and would possess the kingdom (Daniel 7:22). Paul, as elsewhere, has ordinary Christians in mind, not a special class, in the designation "saints." Indeed, that no special holiness beyond what is conferred by the grace of Christ is intended is all too obvious from the fact that these Corinthian Christians are addressed by this term (see also 1 Corinthians 1:2). As sharers in the kingdom of Christ, his people share his judicial function. How this might function is perhaps indicated by Matthew 12:41-42.

Some of the Corinthian Christians had carried this aspect of the divine promise to an extreme. Paul spoke in an ironic form, doubtless echoing claims by the Corinthians themselves, when he said, "Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!" (1 Corinthians 4:8). Some at Corinth were claiming their royal position in an exaggerated form as already theirs. The claim was not wrong; the timing was. But these enthusiasts had caught the spirit of the promises in the Christian gospel.

Inheriting the Kingdom

Eventually all of God's people will enjoy the blessings of the heavenly kingdom. Several times the New Testament speaks of inheriting the kingdom. These passages seem to have the future, heavenly kingdom in mind, as in 1 Corinthians 15:50, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Most of the instances of the phrase "inherit the kingdom" occur in practical exhortations warning of the kind of conduct which will exclude one from the heavenly inheritance.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9f.)

Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (Ephesians 5:5)

For the righteous and faithful servants of God, whose conduct contrasts with that of these vice lists, there is the invitation from Christ seated on his throne, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

Concluding Remarks

Some have thought that the blessings of God's kingdom are all present and belong to this present world. Such were the Corinthian enthusiasts addressed in 1 Corinthians 4:8. Others have made the blessings all future, belonging to the heavenly realm. This latter attitude seems to be more common among Christians in the present age. Neither view is correct. We have much to enjoy now from God's rule — forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We taste now the powers of the age to come. But the best is yet to be.

Life in the world to come and its blessings will be in continuity with the present. Those who share in the kingdom now will be those to participate in it in the future. If one does not live the kingdom life now, he will not have it then.

The theme of the kingdom presses itself upon us with great urgency, even as it did upon the hearers of Jesus' preaching. It requires decisions, the most important decisions of a person's

life. The kingdom has to do with the ultimate realities. It determines life and death, one's view of and place in this world and the world to come.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

On the basis of "all authority," King Jesus commands us to be baptized and to do all he teaches.

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

Chapter 13

Review Questions

1. Cite passages which indicate Christians are now in the kingdom.
2. Cite passages which put the kingdom in the future for Christians.
3. How does Hebrews 6:4-6 describe the present blessings of Christians?
4. Describe the continuity of present and future in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.
5. What is the value of visualization to the athlete? to the Christian?
6. Cite passages which speak of Christians sharing the rule of Christ?
How is this possible?
7. What does it mean to “inherit the kingdom”?
8. What kind of conduct will prevent a person from inheriting the kingdom?
9. What are the effects of an overemphasis on the present or the future kingdom at the expense of the other?
10. How does one accept Jesus as King? What is the importance of doing so?

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