

# **THEOLOGY OF THE KINGDOM**

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The Kingdom of God is the restoration of everything broken that resulted from sin entering the world. While this is the primary teaching of Jesus during his earthly ministry,<sup>1</sup> this biblical concept is traceable throughout the entirety of Scripture. The Kingdom of God is ruled by King Jesus, who is the supreme fulfillment of God's promise for reconciliation with his creation. This eternal realm of God is both here and not yet. Today, Christians live in the last days where we receive the victory of Jesus over evil, yet still remain in a sinful world as we anticipate his return. In this in between period, the church is called to participate in advancing God's ministry of restoration. The Kingdom of God is an overarching biblical reality, ruled over by King Jesus who invites his disciples to partner in the ministry of reconciliation against the kingdom of darkness.

### **A Biblical Basis for the Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom of God is an eternal reality that is described throughout the entirety of the biblical narrative. While Jesus preached about the Kingdom during his earthly ministry as documented in the New Testament, the Old Testament also points to this spiritual reality.

Before the redeemed Kingdom of God came down from heaven, there was an original plan that preceded it. The original plan of creation was for God to gift humanity with their own kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The book of Genesis describes how the fallout of sin quickly destroyed this gift of dominion. With humanity enslaved to sin, God chose the nation of Israel to begin His campaign of redemption in which He would build His Kingdom upon. This royal genealogy begins with Abraham. Based on his faithfulness to God he is told that the Lord will make of his family a great nation in which all the families of the earth will be blessed.<sup>3</sup> Generations later, this lineage is carried through to King David. During his reign over Israel, his spiritual advisor, Nathan,

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<sup>1</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), Kindle Location 178.

<sup>2</sup> (Genesis 1:28, ESV)

<sup>3</sup> (Genesis 12:2-3, ESV)

receives a word from the Lord. The message is about a messianic promise, in which God says, “I will raise up your offspring after you, ...and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”<sup>4</sup> This kingdom-thread continues through the prophets, who speak of a suffering servant that will intercede for sinners.<sup>5</sup> Up until the beginning of the New Testament, the chosen nation of God remains divided and powerless. However, the arrival of the anticipated Messiah imparts the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

The Gospels then tell of Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of God’s promise for an eternal King. Upon Jesus’ arrival, John the Baptist preached to all who would listen, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus displays his victorious kingship in public displays of authority. He heals the sick, delivers the oppressed, and preaches with divine authority about the Kingdom of God. These power encounters point to the greater reality that Jesus is the Son of God. At the conclusion of his ministry, Jesus is crucified for the sins of the world, rises from the dead, and ascends into heaven.

The keys to the Kingdom are then passed off to his disciples who birth the early church. The calling of this movement is to partner with God in restoring creation. This involves combatting the kingdom of darkness with the power and authority of God. Acts and the Epistles tell of the early church movement where the Spirit of God was given to believers.<sup>7</sup> Soon after Jesus’ ascension, disciples gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. As they were gathered together, the Holy Spirit descended upon them, and they began speaking in tongues. This moment ushered in the era of the “last days”, which is a theme of the Kingdom of God that will be discussed later in this paper.

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<sup>4</sup> (2 Samuel 7:12-13, ESV)

<sup>5</sup> (Isaiah 53:12, ESV)

<sup>6</sup> (Matthew 3:2, ESV)

<sup>7</sup> (Acts 2, ESV)

Compelled by the Spirit, apostles like Paul launched mission journeys throughout the Greco-Roman world. Each of Paul's New Testament letters describe various setbacks of the churches Paul had birthed. Many of the challenges faced by these newly formed Christian communities included idolatry, sexual promiscuity, conflict between Jew and Gentile, and clashes between faith and culture. However, these challenges, at their very root, were spiritual. As it says in Ephesians 6:12, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."<sup>8</sup> This battle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness is another theme that will be discussed later in this paper.

The Bible speaks of Jesus and his disciples preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God throughout the world. Today we have the same call, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God with a broken world. Three major themes of the Kingdom of God arise from studying the Scriptures. First, Christ is the victorious King over all creation. Second, Christians live in the "already but not yet" where we await Christ's return to judge the living and the dead. And third, each one of us are called to join in this mission of reconciliation in the world.

### **Kingdom Theme 1: Jesus is King**

When discussing any kingdom, it is implied that there is a king overseeing this empire. Regarding the Kingdom of God, there is only one undisputed King: Jesus Christ. Jesus is supreme and rules over all creation. As the Son of God, Jesus is the "firstborn of all creation,"<sup>9</sup> meaning he is given firstborn status. This ancient tradition of ownership rights being left to the firstborn son applies to Jesus who is given rulership over all things created by God the Father. Serving as the heir, Jesus is therefore ruler over the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>8</sup> (Ephesians 6:12, ESV)

<sup>9</sup> (Colossians 1:15, ESV)

In addition to Jesus' rulership, Jesus is also King because of his role in creation. Scripture describes Jesus as, "before all things, and in him all things hold together."<sup>10</sup> How can this be? Understanding the trinitarian nature of God allows us to see how both the Father and the Son are involved in the Creation of the Kingdom of God. If we imagine the redemption plan as a construction project, then the Father would be the architect and the Son would be the builder. The Father created the universe and saw the broken state of humanity. He instituted a plan, calling for a coming messiah to come and restore relationship with his beloved creation to Himself. Jesus, the builder, entered the world and built the foundation of the Kingdom of God. His life, death, resurrection, and ascension have launched a building process that will continue until Christ's return. At that point, the project will be complete, and God's Kingdom will finally have arrived in its fullness.

When considering Christ's supremacy as King, it is helpful to consider the logic of ownership. When someone creates something, they are given ownership of that creation. We can copywrite our own work and take ownership of it because we made it. In the same way Jesus can take ownership over creation because his Father created it. As the supreme ruler over all creation, there is no competition for God's throne room. Jesus is victorious and sits forever as King. Christians worship their King and are called to submit to his divine lordship. This is both a joy and a privilege for the believer because they are assured that their King is unshakable. Hebrews 12:28 affirms this truth: "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe."<sup>11</sup> Jesus is the King who sits on the throne, ruling over the unshakable Kingdom of God. Believers rest in this encouraging truth as they await the culmination of this promise during Christ's return.

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<sup>10</sup> (Colossians 1:17, ESV)

<sup>11</sup> (Hebrews 12:28, ESV)

## Kingdom Theme 2: Already and Not Yet

The Kingdom of God is a reality that has both already occurred and is yet to come. Firstly, the Kingdom has already come because Jesus has ushered in the victory of the cross over sin and death. Additionally, the Spirit of God has been poured out for those who believe in Jesus. This period is described as “the last days,” referencing a prophetic promise made in Isaiah 2:2, Hosea 3:5, Micah 4:1, and various other Old Testament passages. The institution of the last days marks a point in time where believers are given the keys to the kingdom and called to prophesy and witness to promises of Jesus. Secondly, the Kingdom of God has yet to come because Christians are still awaiting Christ’s return. Jesus tells John in the book of Revelations, “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.”<sup>12</sup> This promise of the second coming of Christ is encouraging for the believer. In a world still tarnished by sin and the kingdom of darkness, there will come a time when Christ prevails and sets all things right. In that moment, the dead in Christ will rise first, followed by those believers who are still alive. There will be no more pain and suffering, and Christians will be caught up with the Lord for all eternity.<sup>13</sup>

We live in the “already but not yet”, a period where the promised Messiah has arrived and fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament prophets including the outpouring of the Spirit and resurrection of Christ. Yet, we still await Christ’s return and the resurrection of the dead as promised in the age to come. Author Clinton E. Arnold stresses, “The kingdom of God coexists with the kingdom of darkness, but it is not a peaceful coexistence; there is tension.”<sup>14</sup> The current period of the Kingdom of God is filled with victory attained and victory yet to come. This

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<sup>12</sup> (Revelations 22:12, ESV)

<sup>13</sup> (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, ESV)

<sup>14</sup> Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare*, Kindle Locations 205-206.

tension demands a response from those adopted into the family of God. With Christ firmly on the throne and the Kingdom of God not yet arriving in its fullness, what are Christians left to do?

### **Kingdom Theme 3: Battling the Kingdom of Darkness**

If Christ is King over all creation, then why do we live in a broken world where evil still exists? Understanding the “already but not yet” nature of the Kingdom of God allows us to answer this question. As believers await the return of Jesus to put an end to sin and suffering, we are invited to partner with God in his mission of reconciliation. We are commissioned by God to share the gospel,<sup>15</sup> heal the sick, and deliver the oppressed.<sup>16</sup> Jesus told his disciples that they would do far greater things than he did when he one day ascended to heaven and left them his Spirit.<sup>17</sup> While we rest assured that the greatest redemptive act in all eternity has been fulfilled on the cross, we can also take this truth as a calling to actively engage in the battle against the kingdom of darkness. This kingdom of darkness is ruled over by Satan.

Satan is the adversary whose sole objective is to compromise the purposes of God in the world. While Satan is still able to oppress and distract people from freedom and relationship with God, this by no means is a dualistic relationship. Satan was created by God, but at some point thereafter became a fallen being. Since that time, the devil has wreaked havoc in the world along with his legion of demons. Today, Christians can exercise their spiritual authority over demonic influences by way of their positional relationship with Christ and their developmental growth in faith and intimacy with Jesus. In today’s specific context, there is a great deal of pluralism and syncretism that has invited demonic influences to infiltrate people’s souls. Fortunately, Christians are under lordship to the King. Author Rob Reimer expresses this supreme power by stating, “In a pluralistic, syncretistic society where all deities are considered equal, only the

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<sup>15</sup> (Matthew 28:19, ESV)

<sup>16</sup> (Matthew 10:1, ESV)

<sup>17</sup> (John 16:7, ESV)

unequal display of Jesus' power will convince people of the supremacy of Christ."<sup>18</sup> To combat the kingdom of darkness and witness to the supremacy of Christ, believers today are called to join the battle being waged against Satan and his demonic army. This call to spiritual arms is enacted when we apply the implications of the Kingdom of God to our lives and ministry.

### **Applying the Kingdom of God to our Lives and Ministry**

After discussing the biblical background and major themes of the Kingdom of God, it is important to conclude with how all of this applies to the life of the believer. We worship a suffering servant who is glorified as King over all creation. We live in an in-between period where Christ has conquered sin and death, yet we are still eagerly awaiting his return. The victory is Christ's, but the final fulfillment of this victory is not yet realized. Lastly, Satan is still attempting to thwart the plans of God as we look forward to Christ's return. How do these various themes of the Kingdom of God apply to our personal faith and ministry to the world?

Personally, we can rest assured that Jesus is in control. When suffering occurs, disaster strikes, or evil forces seem to be gaining ground in the spiritual realm, believers can rest assured that the Kingdom of God will prevail. The kingship of Jesus informs our understanding of the Kingdom of God. Our faith is strengthened as we place it in a King and Kingdom that are unshakable. As stated earlier, the author of Hebrews states, "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe."<sup>19</sup> When all else is shaken up and separated out, the Kingdom of God will stand forever. The only appropriate response to all of this is wholehearted devotion and worship.

Ministerially, the Kingdom of God ushers in a foundational truth and an ever-present calling. The foundational truth is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ who provides

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<sup>18</sup> Rob Reimer, *Spiritual Authority: Partnering with God to Release the Kingdom* (Franklin, TN: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2020), Kindle Locations 208-209.

<sup>19</sup> (Hebrews 12:28, ESV)

salvation for all who believe in him. This belief system must be preached throughout the world and reinforced in every aspect of church activity. Any message outside of God's good news of grace for sinners through faith would be legalistic and misrepresentative of our spiritual condition in Christ.

Additionally, the ever-present calling is one of living in the "already and not yet" and furthering the Kingdom of God. There will come a time when people who have not placed their faith in Jesus will no longer have an opportunity to do so. For believers who live in this in-between period, their calling goes beyond just knowing Jesus for themselves. Beyond receiving the gift of salvation, the Christian church must share their faith with others. Ministers who understand the reality of the Kingdom of God must join Jesus, the apostles, and other believers in furthering this mission of reconciliation. Therefore, the ministry of deliverance, for example, is relevant for the church today. It is merely a continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ in helping bring the Kingdom of God down to earth. As temples of the Spirit, the same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, we have been given the unique opportunity to usher in the Kingdom of God in a world that cries out for a display of power. In this ongoing ministry, people are healed, restored, and saved.

The application of the Kingdom of God on the life of the believer is the realization that each one of us is called not only to receive, but to actively participate. For the believer, the Kingdom of God is both a fulfilled reality in Christ, and a purposeful mission enacted through Christ in us.

### Work Cited

Arnold, Clinton E. *3 Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997.

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