



Eschatology – A Study of the End Times

Lesson 2: Kingdom of God

Introduction

What is the grand purpose of God for human history? When one considers the overall theme of the Bible, they may get various replies depending on who they talk to. They may hear that the theme of the Bible is salvation, or the glory of God, or the covenants, or promises, or something else. While these are important themes clearly observed in the Bible, there is another theme that some have even gone as far as to say is an overarching theme of Scripture, which ties all the other major themes together, and that is the kingdom of God.¹ The kingdom of God is a thread that runs from the beginning of Scripture to the very end, from Genesis to Revelation. Richard Mayhue notes that 36 of 39 Old Testament books and 21 of the 27 books of the New Testament mention kingdom in some shape or form.² So it is an overarching theme, if not at the very least a major theme of Scripture from beginning to end. As we consider the study of eschatology, it is important to have an understanding of the kingdom because it will play a part in what God is doing at the end. In this study, we will consider the definition of the kingdom of God, the reasons of the kingdom being an overarching theme, the timing of the kingdom of God, and finally the church and the kingdom.

The Kingdom of God Defined

The basic meaning of kingdom is rule. When it comes to the Bible, the kingdom of God is the rule of God. According to Alva J. McClain, there are three essential elements of this concept of the kingdom: a ruler, a realm, and rulership. In other words, a kingdom involves a ruler with rightful and adequate authority and power, and subjects who are to be ruled. Therefore, when we consider the kingdom of God, it is the rule of God, the Ruler, over a realm and its subjects.

In Scripture, there are two distinct aspects concerning the kingdom of God. First, there is what is called the _____.³ This is where God reigns over the universe

¹ John MacArthur, Gen. Eds. *Essential Christian Doctrine, A Handbook on Biblical Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 440.

² Richard L. Mayhue, "The Kingdom of God: An Introduction," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 168.

³ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: 1959), 23.

and everything that happens is in accordance with the will of God. God has absolute sovereignty, authority, reign, and control over all of creation from heaven at all times and in all places. Psalm 103:19 shows the extent of His sovereignty and rule. It says, “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules overall.” There is no area of the universe that is not under God’s rule and control. He is sovereign over every detail. Psalm 145:13 highlights the eternal nature of this rule, “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.” McClain state, “This universal kingdom exists without interruption throughout all time.”⁴ Thus, God is reigning and will continue to reign forever.⁵ This is from eternity past to eternity future.

A second aspect of the kingdom is the _____.⁶ This is the kingdom that the Bible often talks about. This is God’s kingdom established on earth, and this kingdom began in Genesis 1. It is mediatorial in that God uses a mediator, human agents, to be His representative and establish His rule on the earth (Gen 1:26–28). God has designated man to rule the earth on His behalf for His glory (Psalm 8:4–8). Because of Adams sin, he failed to fulfill his role as God’s agent to rule the earth. However this will be fulfilled by the Last Adam in which Israel will play a key role.

Kingdom of God as an Overarching Theme

There are several reasons why the kingdom of God is an overarching theme of Scripture. The first reason is the storyline of the Bible. According to Michael J. Vlach, God’s kingdom program can be divided into five major developments of the Bible storyline.⁷

I. _____

The story of the kingdom is present with creation in Genesis 1. God, the King of the universe, creates a perfect world and creates man, His image-bearers, to rule and subdue His creation. Genesis 1:26–28 says that man is made in the image of God, which has the idea of representing God. The term to “rule” and “subdue” used in these verses show man’s task and connection to the earth. This is kingly language because such language is later used of the rule of kings. It can be seen that there are kingdom implications in Genesis 1, and God expects man, as God’s vice-regent (small *k* “king”) to rule, subdue, and fill the earth for His glory (Psalm 8:4–8). This is the creation mandate for man.

II. _____

With the creation mandate in place, man was to rule and reign as God’s vice-regent. However, that did not successfully last. After the task to rule was given, Adam failed to fulfill his obligation because he disobeyed God. Thus, sin entered into the world through

⁴ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 23.

⁵ See also other passages 1 Chron 29:12 and Daniel 4:34. This is the universal sovereign rule of God.

⁶ McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 23.

⁷ Michael Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton: Lampion Press, 2017), 23.

him. Genesis 3 records for us the fall of man which includes man's failure to rule God's creation. Man rebelled against God by rejecting His authority. Adam and Eve sinned and blatantly asserted their independence from God as they ate from the tree of good and evil. Vlach writes, "[such an act] was a statement of autonomy and a declaration of independence from the Creator. Adam and Eve doubted God's truthfulness and goodness and focused instead on their own desires."⁸ With such an act, all of creation was cursed and Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

III. _____

The third development of the storyline is God's promise. The good news is that God would not leave the world in a cursed state. The promise of Genesis 3:15 is God's promise to reverse the curse so that man will effectively rule over creation the way God originally created man to do. Through God's promise, He has enacted a plan to bring this rebellious earth back into conformity with His universal kingdom. This promise is seen in the Old Testament from Genesis 3 to Malachi as mankind was expecting the promised Messiah.

IV. _____

The fourth development of the storyline begins with the arrival of the promised Messiah. This development is called redemption. Jesus, who is the ultimate King, brought redemption through His atonement. His death on the cross is the basis for man's reconciliation and entrance into His kingdom. This was fulfilled at Christ's first coming. The King was born (Matt 1:23; Luke 1:31), the King lived a perfect and righteous life (Heb 4:15), the King went to the cross to die for man's sin, and then He was raised from the dead. The life, death, and resurrection of the King accomplishes redemption for His people in His kingdom. All who repent and believe in the King are citizens of His kingdom.

V. _____

The final development of the storyline is the restoration of all things. This is where the King, Jesus Christ, will return (Rev. 19:11–21), reign with His saints for one thousand years (Rev. 20:1–6) and fulfill the mediatorial mandate of Genesis 1, and restore all things. Christ's mediatorial kingdom will merge with the universal rule of God, and Christ will reign with His saints for all eternity (Rev. 22:3, 5).

Vlach summarizes the storyline stating, "The Bible's storyline shows how the kingdom created goes to the kingdom fallen, which then leads to the kingdom restored. This storyline is centered and anchored in Jesus the Messiah."⁹

⁸ Vlach, *He will Reign Forever*, 67.

⁹ *Ibid*, 23.

A second reason why the kingdom of God is a major theme of the Bible is because the theme of the kingdom of God governs both Old Testament history and prophecy.¹⁰ In addition to the creation mandate in Genesis 1, God chose a people, Israel, to become a kingdom. Exodus 19:6 says of Israel, “And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” In the Abrahamic Covenant, God chose the nation of Israel to be the means through which blessings would be brought to the nations (Gen. 12:1–3). Furthermore, it was predicted beforehand that kings would rule Israel (Deut. 17:14–20). Moving forward, I & II Samuel and I & II Kings described the rise and fall of the kingdom in Israel. With the decline of the kingdom in Israel and the judgment of God looming, the prophets of God prophesied of a future where the kingdom would be restored to Israel and with blessings to the nations (Amos 9:11–15).

A third reason why the kingdom of God is an overarching theme is because the kingdom permeated Jesus’ teachings.¹¹ From the very beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus preached, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). This was also the message of His apostles when He sent them out in Matthew 10:5–7. Furthermore, those who believed, that is repented of their sins and put their faith in Jesus, would enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3; Matt 4:19; 19:21–25). Jesus commanded His listener to seek the kingdom and to pray for its coming (Matt. 6:10, 33). The parables of Christ also revealed mysteries about the kingdom (Matt. 13). The kingdom of God was an important aspect of Jesus’ teaching.

The kingdom of God is an overarching theme of the Bible as seen in the Bible’s developments, the Old Testament history, and in Jesus’ teachings.

The Timing of the Mediatorial Kingdom

When will this mediatorial kingdom of God happen on earth? There are three main views regarding this timing: amillennialism, postmillennialism, and premillennialism. Amillennialists and Postmillennialists would argue to some degree that Christ’s millennial reign is now in the present age. Amillennialists would say that Christ and the perfected saints are ruling from heaven. They believe that the millennium is being fulfilled from heaven as Jesus and deceased saints rule from heaven. They believe Christ’s millennial rule is more spiritual in nature.

Postmillennialists would say that Christ’s millennial rule is currently being fulfilled from heaven through the church. They believe there is both a spiritual and physical aspect. For both the Amillennial and Postmillennial position, the coming of Christ brings the millennium to an end.

Premillennialists teach that Christ’s mediatorial, earthly reign is not happening now.

Premillennialists believe this will not happen until after the second coming of Christ (Rev. 20). The kingdom will be established on earth at Christ’s second coming where Jesus will rule as King on earth for a thousand years. He will come and bind Satan and inaugurate this mediatorial kingdom as He rules from the Davidic throne in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:8–16). The nation of Israel

¹⁰ Ibid, 24.

¹¹ Ibid, 24–25.

will also play a key role as God promised through the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1–3). Once His rule is complete and all the promises are fulfilled, the mediatorial kingdom will merge with the universal rule of God after the millennium (1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 20–21).

The Church and the Kingdom

Now, what is the church's relationship to the kingdom? The church age is a time of preparation before the kingdom will be established. When Jesus came the first time, He came to purchase the salvation for His people (Acts 3:18). This was what the prophets had predicted (Isa. 53). The church is currently living between the two comings where the Word of the Messiah would be proclaimed by the church, and the sons and daughters of God would be brought into the kingdom. Christians are positionally sons and heirs of that coming kingdom. They will rule with Christ in the future in His established kingdom on earth. For this age, the citizens of the kingdom are to exhibit kingdom righteousness in their lives (Matt. 5–7). Thus, the church is not the kingdom of God on earth, but it is a part of God's kingdom plan. Although the kingdom of God itself has not been established, there is a sense in which members of the church are related to the spiritual kingdom blessings of the New Covenant through Jesus Christ.