THEISM

God and His Kingdom

Little is said about the kingdom of God in the Old Testament. In a general sense, "The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19). David said of God, "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations" (Psalm 145:13). King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon said essentially the same thing (Daniel 4:3). After God delivered Daniel from the lion's den, King Darius said that God "is the living God . . . His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end" (Daniel 6:26).

In the Old Testament, a kingdom is predicted that God was yet to establish. Through the prophet Nathan, God informed David that "Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16; see also 1 Kings 2:45). Several centuries later, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44). These prophecies would ultimately be fulfilled through Jesus Christ. Before the birth of Jesus, the angel Gabriel informed Mary that she would give birth to a son and that he "will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David. And . . . of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

In the New Testament, John the Baptist announced the forthcoming kingdom. He preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2; see also Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4). After his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, Jesus also "began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matthew 4:17; see also Mark 1:15). He said, "I must preach the kingdom of God . . . because for this purpose I have been sent" (Luke 4:43). "He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him" (Luke 8:1; see also Luke 9:11). Jesus sent his disciples to the Israelites that they should also "preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matthew 10:7). The expressions "kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God" were used interchangeably (See Matthew 10:7; Luke 9:2; 10:9).

When Jesus was with his disciples in Caesarea Philippi, Peter acknowledged that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then informed his disciples that based "on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:16-19). From this statement come three observations. First, Jesus used the terms "church" and "kingdom of heaven" interchangeably. Second, the church was to be built on the fact that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Third, at the time of Jesus' statement the establishment of the kingdom (i.e., the church) was still to come.

After the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples asked him, "'Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:6-8). The kingdom (i.e., the church) was yet to be established. During his ministry, Jesus had taught that some then living "will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power" (Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). The power of the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' apostles on the first Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection from the dead (Acts 2:1-

4). That's when the kingdom (i.e., the church) was established. Thereafter, "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

The kingdom that God established on that day of Pentecost has Christ as its ruler. The Apostle Paul later wrote that God "has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13). The Hebrew writer acknowledged the rule of God's Son, saying, "But to the Son he says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your Kingdom" (Hebrews 1:8, cited from Psalm 45:6). The Apostle Peter informed his readers that "an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11). When the Apostle John was on the Island of Patmos, he said he was "in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:9). Christ Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16). When this world comes to an end, death will be overcome and Christ will deliver the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom – a kingdom of righteousness. Therefore, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles all declared that entrance into that kingdom requires turning away from sin, i.e., repentance. Moreover, Jesus said, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). He emphasized that "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Jesus blessed the poor in spirit and declared that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3; see also Luke 6:20; James 2:5). The Apostle Paul taught that "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). He exhorted the Thessalonians to "walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12). Jesus taught that "not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Jesus told his disciples that "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17). Because wealthy persons tend to trust in their riches rather than in God, Jesus declared that it is harder for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:23-25). Paul taught that "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50). "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; see also Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5).

Many who may now seem to be citizens of the kingdom of God are really like weeds not immediately detectable among the grain, as described by Jesus in his parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). When describing the final judgment scene, Jesus said, "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 13:41). "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28; see also Matthew 8:11).

Jesus admonished his disciples not to worry about food, clothing, and other worldly possessions, but rather to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:31). What a great blessing to be in God's kingdom where Christ rules and the righteous are fellow citizens.

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