

The Kingdom of God (Abbreviated)

By Bobby Harrington

The reign of God and the realm in which God reigns.

The Lost Kingdom

The story of the Bible is often best understood as the story of God's kingdom. As Old Testament scholar John Bright put it, "For the concept of the Kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, the total message of the Bible. Not only does it loom large in the teachings of Jesus; it is to be found, in one form or another, through the length and breadth of the Bible."ⁱ

There is a sense in which the Bible's story of the Garden of Eden is the story of a lost kingdom. The kingdom had six parts:

- 1) A King (God)**
- 2) A Law (don't eat from tree of knowledge of good/evil)**
- 3) A People (Adam/Men and Eve/Women)**
- 4) A Rule (God walked with Adam and Eve)**
- 5) A Land (the Garden of Eden)**
- 6) Sin (the Fall)**

The original kingdom was destroyed by human sin and lost. We are now in Satan's kingdom (Ephesians 2:1-6).

The Kingdom of God in Old Testament Promises

1. The King – there is a king coming, he will be like David; he is the Messiah.

2 Samuel 7:11-13 - The LORD declares to you [David] that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Isaiah 11:1-5 - A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse [King Davdi's father]; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

2. The Law – God will give a new Law, focused on the heart.

Deuteronomy 18:17-19 - The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. . . . The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He

will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name.

Jeremiah 31:33–34 - “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

3. The People – God will make a new plentiful people.

Genesis 12:2-3 - I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Isaiah 49:6 - It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

4. The Reign – God will reign/rule hearts and then all creation.

Ezekiel 36:25-27- I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Isaiah 44:3 - For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants (Isaiah 44:3).

5. The Land – God will rule over all creation in the New Heaven, New Earth.

Amos 9:13-15 - The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills, and I will bring my people Israel back from exile. They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,” says the LORD your God.

Isaiah 65:17-18 - See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

6. Sin – Atoned and removed by the Messiah

Hebrews 9:11-12 - So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever (Hebrews 9:11-12, NLT).

Isaiah 53:2-6 - He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of sorrows, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely, he took our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus the Messiah Fulfilled the Unfilled Prophecies

Jesus established a kingdom that will never end. The promise of this kingdom was an important theme in the Old Testament book of Daniel. When the angel announced the conception of Jesus to his mother, the angel told Mary, “His kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33). In the book of Revelation, Christ’s kingdom is one he will reign over “for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

- 1. King - Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Davidic king.** God promised he would raise up a descendant of David (Isaiah 11:1; Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32). This was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, who was Israel’s king. As King, he does not rule in the same way that kings in this world rule, for his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). The kingdom of Christ was (and is) displayed by the rule of God within the hearts of people (Luke 17:20-21; Matthew 6:33), and its ultimate manifestation will come at the end of human history (Matthew 25:34).
- 2. Law - Jesus is the long-awaited lawgiver, prophet.** (Hebrews 3:1-6). At the time Jesus appeared, many were hoping and looking for the special prophet who would be like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15ff; John 1:45; 5:46). After Jesus was resurrected, his disciples soon realized that he was this prophet. Anyone who did not listen to him was to be cut off, but it was God’s hope that he would cause people to turn from their wicked ways (Acts 3:21-26).
- 3. People - Jesus establishes a kingdom people, including both Israelites and Gentiles.** Just before he left his disciples to go to heaven, Jesus declared that they were to go out and make disciples of all nations—by baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything that he had commanded (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Luke 24:47).

4. **Reign - Jesus establishes a new reign in his kingdom, by the power of the Holy Spirit.** God's work in his kingdom is through the transformation of the heart, the inner person. In Jesus' kingdom, people personally "know the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).
5. **Land - Jesus establishes the promise of a renewed land in his kingdom by the use of miracles.** When Jesus is present, demons are cast out, sickness is healed, people can walk on water, etc. These are signs of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). These acts are a foretaste of what it will be like when the kingdom is fully established – in the New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21:1ff)
6. **Sin - Jesus Christ is the faultless Israelite, who provides for the removal of the people's sins.** Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God, was sacrificed to take away the sins of the whole world (John 1:29). God presented Christ as a sacrifice that took away the punishment due for the sins of all people (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2). Jesus was the suffering Israelite to whom Isaiah pointed (53:7) and about whom Zechariah spoke (12:10–13:1). Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of God (Acts 8:31-40).

The Already Kingdom

Jesus told some of those who were living in the first century that "some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power" (Mark 9:1). No one yet understood or foresaw how the kingdom of God could be established without the toppling of empires and the restoration of Israel's glory. But Jesus explained how the kingdom came into the lives of his disciples:

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:20-21).

On another occasion in Jesus' life, he described the kingdom's presence with these words:

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time *has come*," he said. "The kingdom of God *has come near*. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15, emphasis mine).

Again, the kingdom is both "the reign of God" and "the realm in which God reigns." Through Jesus, God rules over us as we trust and follow Jesus. The church, which we will describe in a later chapter, is the community where Jesus' rule is most clearly manifest in the world.

The Not-Yet Kingdom

There are two "comings" of the Messiah Jesus. The first coming was his birth, life, teaching, and his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. The second coming will be when Jesus returns to the earth as conquering Messiah, to judge the living and the dead at the end of time.

Although the kingdom has been present since the days of Jesus, it will not be fully consummated until he returns. Equal to the emphasis in the Bible on the "present kingdom" is the emphasis on the "future kingdom." In this sense, we still await the kingdom, even praying for it to

come (Matthew 6:10). Paul encouraged the Thessalonian Christians to hold on to the faith in the midst of difficulty, for it showed their future destiny in the kingdom of God:

All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. . . . This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels (2 Thessalonians 1:5-7).

God established his kingdom through Jesus, but the ultimate kingdom rule of God will not be made visible until Jesus returns. At that time, God will bring about the judgment of all human beings and take those who were loyal, faithful subjects of Jesus to be with him in a transformed eternity, where the complete rule and reign of God over all nature will be complete. Jesus described this reality in Matthew 25:

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

In this "eternal kingdom," Jesus will have a banquet with his subjects (Matthew 8:11). There will be no more crying, death, or tears, for the old order of this world will be gone (Revelation 21:3-6). Jesus gave his followers a foretaste of this new world order by casting out demons and healing the sick (Matthew 4:23). In the future kingdom, Satan and all evil will be banished (Revelation 19-22), and all the things that are out of keeping with God's best plan for humanity will be gone: sickness, disease, anything that harms, and death will be banished by the complete reign of God's kingdom (2 Peter 3:10-13).

ⁱ John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1980), 7.