

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The Gospel of Matthew

The Nature of Biblical Theology

- Biblical theology is the interpretation of Scripture, where the reader asks questions about God along the **temporal** flow of the Bible's storyline
- In doing biblical theology in the NT, one must be sensitive to its OT background
- Tracing linguistic elements (i.e. "**the kingdom of God**" βασιλεία του θεού) is helpful but ultimately limited
- The reader must be sensitive to the development of themes or ideas in the Bible's storyline—the BIG picture

OT Background

- From the very beginning to the end, the Bible proclaims God's **sovereign rule** as both **creator** and **sustainer** over all things
- As the climax to his ordering of creation, God creates humans in his image and authorizes them to govern the earth (Gen 1:26-28)
- Although God instructs the first couple to rule over all the animals, they succumb to the temptation of the “serpent” and rebelled against God (Gen 3)
- By manipulating Adam and Eve, the serpent or Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:2) becomes the “prince of this world” (Jn 16:11), usurping God's position as king

Restoring God's Rule on Earth

- While humanity's rebellion against God has many consequences (i.e., death), God embarks on a mission to rescue the wayward people from the powers of evil and death (Gen 12:1-3)
- The OT anticipates the coming of a great **king** who would bring God's blessing to the nations
- With the founding of Israel, God makes David **king** (1 Sam 16:1-13) and becomes the founder of a unique dynasty

Restoring God's Rule on Earth

- The partial convergence between God's **kingdom** and David's **kingdom** occurs when David captures Jerusalem and transports the ark of the covenant there (2 Sam 6-7)
- This is demonstrated when Solomon constructs a splendid temple, or palace, for God in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 5-8)
- As temple-builder, the king plays a special role in establishing God's **reign** on earth
- Unfortunately, as Ps 2 reveals, the nations stand in opposition to both God and his anointed king

Restoring God's Rule on Earth

- Nevertheless, the expectation existed that a future **Davidic king** would bring justice and peace (Ps 72)
- This hope emerges in the prophetic passages that anticipate a future **Messianic king** and age (Isa 2:2-4; 9:2-7; 11:1-2)
- Because David's successors failed to remain faithful to God, the OT storyline reveals the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 587-65 BC
- Despite this setback to establishing God's kingdom on earth, the hope lived on that a future **Davidic king** would come

Jesus as the Davidic King in Matthew's Gospel

- When the gospels speak of Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ or “anointed one,” they view him as fulfilling the OT expectation involving the Davidic dynasty
- His introductory statement that Jesus is both the “**son of David**” and the “**son of Abraham**” (1:1) indicates that salvation promises made through David to God’s chosen people, Israel (2 Sam 7:8-17) and through Abraham to all peoples (Gen 12:1-3) have been fulfilled through Jesus
- Of all the gospel writers, Matthew most fully develops Jesus’ links with the Davidic dynasty
- From Matthew’s initial genealogy to his concluding observation about Jesus having all authority in heaven and on earth, he consistently emphasizes Jesus’ kingly nature

Jesus as the Davidic King in Matthew's Gospel

- Matthew portrays Jesus shunning political powers to establish his kingdom on earth, even though he displays exceptional powers over nature
- Rather, Jesus establishes his kingdom by his self-giving, sacrificial death on the cross
- The kingdom which Jesus created is an **inverted kingdom**. He died in order to end Satan's rule over the earth and loose human beings from Satan's control
- Jesus' death opens the way for releasing those who are enslaved to evil (Matt 12:25-29)

Jesus as the Davidic King in Matthew's Gospel

- In light of his mission, Jesus (like John the Baptist) proclaims the coming of the “**kingdom of heaven**” or “**kingdom of God**” and urges his listeners to enter by repenting (Matt 4:17; 3:2) and believing the good news (Mk 1:15)
- Through a series of parables (i.e., the parable of the sower), Jesus provides insights into the **nature of the kingdom**, as stemming from the heart (Matt 13)
- The kingdom will grow gradually, starting with something small but eventually reaching great size (Matt 13:31-33)

Jesus as the Davidic King in Matthew's Gospel

- During this growing phase, the devil will actively seek to hinder growth. Those who become members of the kingdom will face persecution
- Even Jesus himself is tempted, and he must resist Satan's offer of his universal or earthly kingdom (Matt 4:8-9)
- Since the coming of the kingdom does not immediately end all evil, Jesus reveals that at the end of the growing phase, he will return as universal judge to separate the righteous and the wicked (Matt 25:31-46)
- Not everyone who initially responds to the gospel will remain submissive to the king. Their actions (e.g., a tree and its fruit) will reveal otherwise (Matt 7:15-23)

Jesus as the Davidic King in Matthew's Gospel

- While Jesus notes the tragic consequences of not being within the kingdom, he also speaks positively about the benefits of kingdom membership. To be within the kingdom is worth everything a person possesses (Matt 13:44-46)
- The kingdom of God exists wherever people acknowledge him as king
- Jesus' followers must consistently pray for the coming of God's kingdom on earth (Matt 6:9-10) and make disciples throughout the whole world (Matt 28:19-20)

Kingdoms in Conflict

- Although Christ's sacrificial death on the cross ensures Satan's ultimate defeat, the evil one continues to resist the expansion of God's kingdom on earth
- In this on-going conflict, the enemies are not "flesh and blood," but the "powers of this dark world" and "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12)
- Christians must therefore equip themselves with appropriate armour to do battle (Eph 6:13-17)

Kingdoms in Conflict

- In establishing his authority on earth, Jesus rejects using political power or physical violence. He leads by servanthood and example
- Instead, he willingly permits his enemies to execute him as a common criminal
- For Jesus, the path to creating God's kingdom on earth is through suffering and death
- By laying down his life, Jesus is exalted to rule over all (Phil 2:7-11)
- Jesus will ultimately triumph over all enemies and reign over all, death being the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor 15:24-26)

Conclusions

- The history of the church reveals that Christ's followers have not always grasped that they cannot establish the kingdom by force
- Regrettably, professing Christians have occasionally taken up arms in the name of Christ, believing that this was God's will
- The Bible emphasizes that people cannot be forced to submit to God's rule but must be persuaded by love

Conclusions

- This world is divided between those who welcome and those who oppose God's kingdom on earth
- For now, Christians must persevere in the face of opposition, realizing that the conflict will one day end when Jesus returns in glory
- Until then, the mission of the church is to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, ever praying, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:9-10)

The Kingdom and the Church

- The church is not the kingdom (Matt 16:18-19)
- The kingdom creates the church (Matt 13:1-9)
- The church witnesses to the kingdom (Acts 1:8)
- The church is the instrument of the kingdom (Matt 4:13-16)
- The church is the custodian of the kingdom (Matt 21:43-44)