**GOSPEL AND KINGDOM SERIES**

**Part 4 THE KINGDOM REVEALED IN EDEN**

**The creation**

The fact that God is creator and humanity is His creation establishes at the outset the basis for understanding the Kingdom of God. God is sovereign over His creation. His rule is absolute and uncompromised. Humanity is ruled and belongs, as part of the creation, within the sphere of God’s perfect rule. The only perfect existence for all of God’s creation, including humanity, is within the framework of the rule of God.

The ‘creatorship’ of God implies that nothing exists except by the will and word of God. The world does not have two compartments, one secular and the other spiritual. Because all reality depends on the creative word of God, this same word of God must judge the ideas of humanity about truth and error, and not the other way around. The Christian understanding of the authority of Scripture has its roots in the creation narrative.

**Humanity in the image of God**

God created humanity in His image and delegated to them authority over the rest of the created order (Genesis 1:26f). Something of this ‘image-bearing’ must relate to humanity’s ruling function. The ‘image and likeness’ of God is seen in the first male and female together. Adam does not perfectly reflect God alone and nor does Eve perfectly reflect God alone; but together, the image and likeness of the Creator is best seen.

It needs to be noted that humanity is the summit of creation and the summit of the image of God; and that humanity is wholly dependant on the Creator for existence.

**Eden – the garden Kingdom**

The pattern of the Kingdom of God is established in the Garden of Eden. Here are the people of God (Adam and Eve in their innocence), the garden paradise (the place which God prepared as the perfect environment for His people) and the rule of God expressed through the word of God. God, as the sovereign King, sets the limits, ‘*You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’* (Genesis 2:16,17a). The perfect relationship between Creator and created, between the ruler and the ruled, cannot exist if the creature seeks to usurp the role of the Creator by rejecting His rule: ‘*for when you eat of it you will surely die’* (Genesis 2:17b).

Here is the essential framework for understanding the nature of the Kingdom:

God’s people (Adam and Eve)

in God’s place (the Garden of Eden)

under God’s rule (the word of God)

This pattern will emerge over and over as the goal of all God’s activity. As it was in the Garden, so it will be in the redemptive process which leads to the new creation. The tree of life, denied to rebellious Adam, will re-emerge in the description of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 22 (as well as in the earlier promise to the overcoming saints in Revelation 2:7 ‘*To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which s in the Paradise of God*.’)

**The fall of humanity**

The fall is the outcome of humanity’s unilateral declaration of independence. The temptation was directed at Adam and Eve’s relationship to God’s word to them, ‘*Did God really say …*’ (Genesis 3:1). This initial subtle questioning of God’s word put a question mark in Adam and Eve’s mind. Knowing this, the devil moved to deny the truth of what God had said, ‘*You will not surely die’* (Genesis 3:4). In ultimately rejecting God’s word, Adam and Eve were rejecting God’s rule over them. They chose to be independent of God and so self-sufficient.

God could not be true to who He was and at the same time tolerate this dethronement by His created ones. Judgement was inevitable. God had said ‘*When you eat of it you will surely die’* (Genesis 2:17) and they did. They were immediately cut off from God. Physical death would follow this spiritual death. Today ‘dead’ man is sinful man, anyone who rejects the Kingdom of God. ‘Dead’ man is man outside the Garden.

The sovereignty of God and the Kingdom of God

Neither humanity nor the devil can escape the sovereign power of God. In the end all who rebel against the Creator will be forced to submit to the undeniable reality of God’s lordship. But the Kingdom of God is the sphere of God’s rule in which His created ones willingly submit to His righteous rule. God’s sovereign rule is universal but the Kingdom of God is not. There is hell as well as heaven, the world of darkness as well as the Kingdom of light.

Judgement

The judgement involved firstly the disruption of the relationship between humanity and God. This was seen in the ejection of Adam and Eve from the Garden. But there is another disruption – in the relationship between man and woman. The perfect harmony gave way to rivalry and accusation (Genesis 3:12,16). A third disruption occurred in the relationship between humanity and the physical creation which was no longer under human dominion (Genesis 3:17-19). Autonomous humanity is God-denying and therefore life-denying as well. Fallen humanity is dead spiritually. Outside of Eden there is no return. Nor is there free choice for Adam and Eve’s family. Adam’s fall from the Garden-Kingdom is the fall of the human race. Everyone is now born outside the Garden, an active rebel, asserting autonomy and independence of the God of life. The human will is now in bondage. No one can continually choose to do right. Humanity is in sin and has come into a slavery to its pull.

Grace

Grace is shown in God’s attitude to rebellious sinners in showing them undeserved and ill-deserved mercy. They deserve the very opposite. The Genesis 3 story is one of both judgement and grace. The fact that God did not immediately obliterate the first humans but preserved them, and that He continued to talk with them was a demonstration of His grace.

Grace was seen in the judgement of the snake. God remains righteous and the devil, the father of lies, is destined for his final reward.

Genesis 3:15 has long been recognised as a word of grace, a *proto-evangel* (the first reference to the gospel), promising that the ‘offspring’ of the woman would be instrumental in the reversal of wrong. The snake has led man to his fall and is blameworthy. Humanity has been willingly led and shares blame. Grace operates in the face of blame-worthiness.

Grace is seen in the maintenance of society. The image of God has not been obliterated and humanity retains some rule over the rest of creation. Man and woman continue to relate and reproduce, even though their relationship together is corrupted. The world outside has been scarred by humanity’s fall (Romans 8:20-22)

**The two family lines**

Genesis 4-11 contains a compact story covering a very long period of time. In keeping with the method of biblical theology, the emphasis in these chapters is how we are to understand their overall message. The first history of fallen humanity in a fallen world is an example of history that is theologically oriented. The two lines of people, characterised by the heads of each line, are Cain and Abel.

The narrative of Cain and Abel depicts one effect of the fall of humanity – rivalry and murder. The account then turns to the genealogy of Cain’s ungodly line – characterised as developers of the city and of industry, and climaxed by the viciousness of Lamech (Genesis 4:17-24). The godlessness of humanity is stressed in Genesis 6 as God declares His intention to destroy humanity (6:7). This godless line will disappear in the flood.

Meanwhile a godly line begins with Seth who takes the place of his murdered brother, Abel (Genesis 4:25). Down this family line are Enoch, who *walked with God* (Genesis 5:22) and Noah. The salvation of Noah and his family through the great flood is an act of God’s sheer grace, leading to a new beginning.

Again there comes a division of humanity with Ham representing the godless line and Shem as the father of the godly (Genesis 11:10-26).

Man, the rebel, is dead in his sin and wickedness (Ephesians 2:1) but is still the object of God’s grace and promise. Already there is evidence of the relationship God wants to have with a new race of humanity, and there are signs that the Kingdom of God will break into the fallen world in a demonstration of redemptive mercy. Only then will we see God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule.

This study is essentially a summary of ‘The Kingdom Revealed in Eden’ by Graeme Goldsworthy in ‘*Gospel and Kingdom’* (The Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1987)