**GOSPEL AND KINGDOM SERIES**

**Part 9 THE KINGDOM REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST (2)**

**The people of the Kingdom**

The first element of our Old Testament Kingdom of God formula (God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule) was the people of God. In Eden God’s people were Adam and Eve. In Israel’s history, the people of God were essentially the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. In prophetic hope, the people of God were the faithful remnant of Israel. In the gospel, the people of God centre in Jesus Christ.

First, Jesus is depicted as the true (or last) Adam

* Jesus is descended from Adam (Luke 3:23-38)
* Jesus overcomes temptation where Adam failed (Mark 1:12,13)
* Jesus’ baptism identifies Him with Adam’s race (Luke 3:21,22)
* Jesus is the last Adam (Romans 5:18-21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22,45-49)
* Jesus is the Son of Man (a term meaning human being and so a member of Adam’s race)

Secondly, Jesus is the seed of Abraham. Paul makes this claim in Galatians 3:16 *(‘The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ’)*. His argument draws on the Old Testament solidarity of a race with its head. Paul could see that the seed of Abraham, Israel, could only have meaning in Christ. The same point is made in the gospels. Matthew’s genealogy establishes Jesus as the son of Abraham through David’s genealogy (Matthew 1:1)

Thirdly, Jesus is the true Israel. This is a development of the last point because Israel is the seed of Abraham. Matthew notes ‘*Out of Egypt I called my son’* (2:15) when describing Joseph and Mary’s return from Egypt with the infant Jesus after the death of Herod. Any application of an historical reference to Israel, to a similar event in Jesus’ life, implies some kind of identity to warrant the description of ‘fulfilment.’ In the accounts of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13), the scriptures quoted by Jesus come from the early chapters of Deuteronomy which deal with Israel’s temptation in the Sinai wilderness. The implication is that, where Israel failed, Jesus (the true Israel) overcame.

Fourthly, Jesus is the Son of David. The promise God made to Abraham’s descendants was frequently summarised with the covenant formula ‘I will be their God and they shall be my people.’ In 2 Samuel 7:14, the son of David has this promise applied to him in a personal way ‘*I will be his father and he will be my son*.’

These various identities establish that Jesus Christ is the head of the new race. All who are united to Him are members of that race but only because He is that race. Whoever is ‘in Christ’ is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) because he or she belongs to the new order of which Christ is the head.

**The location of the Kingdom**

The second element of the Old Testament kingdom formula (God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule) was ‘God’s place.’ The New Testament idea of Kingdom is not confined to a strict spatial concept as a garden (Eden) or a land (Israel).

In the first stratum of revelation, the place of the kingdom was Eden and in the second, it was the land of Canaan. Since both were part of this earth, there is a predictable continuity between them despite the fact that the first preceded the Fall and the second followed. The third stratum, the prophetic futurist kingdom, adapted the Canaan model of kingdom location but ‘glorified’ it.

In the Old Testament salvation included a restoration of God’s people into the environment which best fitted their restored relationship with God. As Eden represented the perfection of the first creation, so the redemptive process entailed a re-making of the Eden paradise. This progression of imagery could be summarised as the garden paradise at the beginning, the land ‘flowing with milk and honey’ in Israel’s history, and the new heavens and earth with a new paradise in the prophetic view.

The New Testament continues this progression. Jesus declared that the kingdom of God was not from this world (John 18:36) while repeating the Old Testament images with greater clarity. Peter repeated Isaiah’s prediction of a new heaven and earth but saw it representing such a complete break with things as they now were that the present order must pass away (2 Peter 3:10-13).

The Old Testament developed the ‘Israel’ stratum by focussing on Jerusalem (Zion) as the centre of God’s land. It followed that the prophets often depicted the restoration of Zion as the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. It is to Zion that the faithful remnant come. Similarly, it is to Zion that the Gentiles come who are being drawn into the Kingdom.

Israel’s hope was that the nation would return to Zion (Isaiah 35:10) but Hebrews 12:22 states that a Jew comes to Zion by being converted to Christ. Zion is where Jesus reigns now, at the right hand of God and this is where we come by faith in the gospel. Down a similar line, Hebrews 11:8-16 interprets Abraham’s hope in gospel terms. Abraham looked forward to the city whose builder and maker was God (11:10). Speaking of the patriarch’s hope, the writer of Hebrews maintains that they desired a better country, a heavenly one (11:16). The gospel enabled the writer to transform the Old Testament image, which was bound to its old order, into an aspect of the new order.

Another important focal point in the locality of God’s kingdom is the Temple. The Temple could function as such a focal point because it represented the dwelling of God among His people. It demonstrated that the promised land was not just living space for people but was the setting for a relationship between God and man. The Temple was integral to the existence of the existence of the Kingdom of God and by it the Kingdom could be identified.

The use made of the Temple theme in the New Testament is vital. The New Testament declares that the new Temple has already come into existence. It is Jesus Christ Himself. John describes the incarnation: ‘*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us’* (1:14). ‘*Made his dwelling’* is literally ‘tabernacled.’ John saw Jesus as resembling the tabernacle in the wilderness because in Jesus, God was again dwelling among us.

The idea was developed further. Jesus is God and man in perfect union. The very being of Jesus is the most perfect relationship of God and man. When Jesus disputed with the Jews over His cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13-22) he proposed as a sign of His authority: ‘*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days*’ (2:19). His opponents were obsessed with the old order and could not think beyond the building itself. John says Jesus was referring to His own body as the Temple. The resurrection gave the disciples the key to what Jesus had meant (2:22).

These images of locality – garden, land, city, temple – all reach their fulfilment in the gospel. In the New Testament the locality of the Kingdom of God is in Jesus Christ Himself, the God-man who was raised from the dead and is now seated at God’s right hand.

**The rule of the Kingdom**

The third element in our Old Testament Kingdom pattern (God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule) is the rule of God over His people by His word. The different covenants of the Bible all testify to this in their own contexts. God ruled in Eden by the word which defined Adam’s freedom. Relating to Abraham, God not only called him, directed him and made promises to him, but clearly the goal was relationship expressed in the covenant summary ‘I will be your God, you shall be my people.’ Later, when Israel understood itself as God’s people, this was expressed in the covenant at Sinai which defined their role. Later still, the prophetic hope did not see a different covenant ruling the restored people, but a newly applied covenant – written on human hearts – so there would be perfect compliance with God’s character and will (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

There are New Testament examples to show that the gospel is the fulfilment of the hope of the new covenant. The song of Mary saw the coming of Jesus as Old Testament hope coming to fruition (Luke 1:46-55). Likewise the songs of Zechariah and Simeon interpret the incarnation in Old Testament terms of covenant (Luke 1:68-79; 2:29-32). At the last supper Jesus declared that the cup ‘*is the new covenant in my blood*,’ indicating that His death establishes the reality of the new covenant, just as the old covenant was sealed with sacrificial blood (1 Corinthians 11:25; Exodus 24:8).

In Hebrews 8 and 9 the writer says the new covenant is better than the old (which has become obsolete) but still sees clearly the connection between the old and new. Hebrews’ author establishes the new by showing how it achieved perfectly what the old could only foreshadow. Jesus came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17-20). The Law remains the standard of God’s righteousness (Romans 2:13). Faith does not overthrow the Law but upholds it (Romans 3:31). Jesus lived and died to fulfil the demands and the penalty of the Law. We could not do it ourselves but this did not remove the demand. Believing that Christ did it for us upholds the demand.

Another main theme relating to God’s rule is the concept of kingship. The judges in Israel were forerunners to the king in some regards, but it is with David that the significance of this mediation of God’s rule emerged. The pattern of kingship was given in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 where the king was mediator of the covenant. In 2 Samuel 7 the kingly rule was seen in relationship to the Temple so that the throne and Temple became almost synonymous in their significance.

The New Testament takes up the hope of the restoration of the rule of David in the Kingdom of God firstly by showing that Jesus is the Son of David who by implication will rule in God’s Kingdom forever; and secondly, by showing that the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning David’s restored rule occurred at the resurrection: ‘*But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah’* (Acts 2:30,31). ‘*God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David”’* (Acts 13:34).

Coming back to the Temple theme, the New Testament sees the Temple coming to its fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. It was a sign that God dwelt among His people to rule that the holy of holies in the tabernacle contained the ark of the covenant inside which was the written law (Exodus 25:21,22). Solomon’s temple prefigured the fulfilment of the promises to David concerning the rule of David’s son given in 2 Samuel 7. Ezekiel focussed on the new temple as the sign of God’s ruling and life-giving presence in the kingdom (Ezekiel 47:1-12). Zechariah saw a new temple built by David’s descendant Zerubbabel through the Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

John saw the true Temple as the bodily presence of Jesus the Word (John 1:14; 2:21). Stephen understood the need to let go of the man-built temple to move to the gospel fulfilment. To hang onto the old was to resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:46-51). For Paul the temple was fulfilled both in the resurrection of Christ (Acts 13:34; Ephesians 2:6) and the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:18-22; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16). Peter also saw both the heavenly Temple (Acts 2:30,31) and the earthly creation of the Spirit in the church (1 Peter 2:4-8). The climax comes in Revelation 21 and 22 where the heavenly reality becomes the ultimate point of reference. Here God Himself is the Temple so there is no need for symbolic structures (Revelation 21:22). In Revelation too the throne of God is in the place of the Temple in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 47) from which flows the river of life (Revelation 22:1-5). Temple theology is fulfilled through the gospel *‘And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God’* (Revelation 21:3)

**The Kingdom: now and not yet**

How do we relate the present reality of salvation for the believer to the final revealing of the Kingdom of God in all its glory? The New Testament portrays the Christ event of 2,000 years ago, as the finished, perfect work of God for the salvation of all His people, both Jew and Gentile. The gospel – the first coming of Christ – won for believers all the riches of glory. The acceptance of the believer before God is perfect and complete the moment he or she believes because Christ and His work are perfect. The status of the believer can never be improved upon. We possess all riches in Christ. There is nothing the believer will possess in glory that he or she does not possess in Christ. All we possess, we possess by faith.

The Christian lives in a tension between the *now* of living ‘by faith’ and the *not yet* of knowing the full reality of the kingdom ‘by sight.’

The first coming of Christ interprets the second coming. For the believer, the second coming of Christ will be the manifestation of His glory and of the glory of His Kingdom, a glory which now we can only grasp by faith. For the unbeliever, the second coming will be a manifestation of judgement, the judgement that already rests on all sinners even though they don’t realise or acknowledge it.

**Christ the Kingdom**

The Kingdom of God has been defined as God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule. The New Testament sees the primary point of reference for each of these aspects in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the true (representative of the) people of God, the true kingly sphere and the true rule of God.

Jesus Christ contains in Himself the Kingdom of God. The gospel is a gospel of humanity restored to proper relationships in Christ. These relationships involve the whole reality: God, humanity and the created order. As Eden and Canaan are in Christ, so God’s perfect world is in Christ. The gospel is far more than ‘forgiveness of sins’ and ‘going to heaven when you die.’ The gospel is the restoration of relationships between God, humanity and the world. The typology of the Bible and the transformation of Old Testament imagery by the gospel gives us a picture beyond our present world and impacts our view of the world, politics, culture, the arts, ecology and science.

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