

“The Kingdom of God is not an all or nothing proposition.” – Ryan Carroll

The Kingdom of God: Prophetic Vision, Early First-Century Hopes, Jesus’ Teaching, and Me

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Handout 1: Week 2 Notes

Review from Week One:

The three main positions along the spectrum concerning the timing, the substance, and the geography of the Kingdom of God:

Position 1: Futurist Eschatology/Dispensational/Pre-millennial (Messiah’s earthly Kingdom still to come.)

This position broadly focuses on the still future restoration of Israel within this current age. The church is NOT the true heir of the promises to Israel in the OT prophets. Jesus the Messiah will return and rule within this historical epoch from Jerusalem for “a thousand years.” It is at this time that most of the OT prophetic oracles concerning Israel’s restoration are to be fulfilled. The kingdom language around Christ’s current position of authority at the right hand of God is generally downplayed.

Position 2: Inaugurated Eschatology/Covenantal/Amillennial (The “millennial” kingdom of the Messiah is primarily a heavenly kingdom that began when Jesus ascended to the “right hand of God” in Acts.)

Focuses on the tension between a kingdom that has been inaugurated already at Jesus’ first coming but has not yet reached its telos, or fullness. Israel as a national entity may or may not still be in the future picture for this group. This group often sees that Jesus redefines true Israel as those who are in Him, both Jew and Gentile. OT prophetic oracles of the future restoration of Israel are dealt with a few different ways depending upon whether one still sees a future for ethnic Israel or not. For those who do NOT see this future for Israel as a nation, the prophetic oracles are often redefined as being fulfilled in and through the body of the Messiah’s church.

Position 3: Realized Eschatology/Preterist/Post-Millennial (Messiah’s Kingdom is fully realized on earth.)

The Kingdom has already come in its fullness. Messiah will rule over nations continually from heaven only. Jesus has already returned (for some in this camp) when Israel as a nation and the temple were destroyed by Rome in 70 AD. Some still see a future return. Most see the history of Israel as a national entity as being completed when they rejected their Messiah and were accordingly judged. The church, Jew and Gentile, are the true heirs of Abraham and the recipients of the restoration promised by the OT prophetic oracles. Depending upon perspective, the Church is supposed to live out the reality of the Kingdom and either be directly responsible for, or participate in some way, in the Kingdom becoming more and more of a reality on earth as it is in heaven.

Week 2:**Prophetic (OT) picture of the Kingdom of God:**

The Kingdom of God would look something like an amalgam of the following:

1. Israel's sins will be forgiven; the New Covenant will be enacted (Jer. 31:31-34).
2. The Temple will be rebuilt; Yahweh's glory will return to it (Is. 44; Ezek. 43).
3. Yahweh will "return" to Zion and dwell among His people (Is. 24:23, 40:3-5, 52:7).
4. Davidic King will reign over Israel and the nations (Is. 9; Jer. 23:5, 30:9, 33:14; Ezek. 34:23-24).
5. The enemies of Israel and Yahweh will be defeated (Dan. 7; Is. 63, Is. 34).
6. The Spirit of Yahweh will be poured out on Israel and mankind (Joel 2; Ezek. 37; Is. 44:3).
7. Yahweh's healing and justice will characterize society (Is. 35, Is. 61).
8. Exiles of Israel will return to the land (Is. 51:11).
9. Gentiles will come to worship Yahweh in Jerusalem (Is. 66:19-21).
10. The nation of Israel will experience a resurrection (Ezek. 37).

The continuing exile of Israel from 587 BC to first-century AD:

When the Persian King Cyrus (after the Medo-Persians defeated Babylon) is raised up by Yahweh to release some Jews from exile to return and begin rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple, none of the above promises of the Kingdom come to fruition: Yahweh's glory does not return to the temple when it was rebuilt in 515 BC, and Israel as a land is only a satrapy of the Persian empire. Ezra declares that he and his fellow Jews are "slaves in their own land" (9:6).

- No promises of the Kingdom materialize down through the rise and fall of the Greek Empire, the Egyptian/Ptolemaic/Syrian rule, and finally the Roman Empire.
- Israel gains some autonomy over its own internal religious affairs but no political autonomy.
- After the Maccabean revolt against the heavy persecution of Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes (who set up an altar to Zeus in the Jerusalem Temple), the temple is cleansed and becomes the precincts of ruling priestly families until the time of Jesus.
- Temple rulers are often corrupt, connected to the power structure of the overlords in some way, shape, or form.
- The sectarian community of the Essenes dismisses the current temple and its rulers and sets up a community out in the wilderness (at Qumran) to become the vanguard of God's chosen people when the Kingdom finally comes.
- Unrest, Roman repression, the rise of Jewish zealot groups, and would-be Messiah's characterize the late first-century BC until the time of Jesus.

Within this repression and (current) exile, a dominant Jewish narrative of the Kingdom of God in first-century AD looks something like this:

The Messiah will:

1. Destroy Rome and all the pagan Gentiles who oppress Israel politically;
2. Restore power and prestige to Israel in the world;
3. Affirm the Temple (Israel's most prized symbol of its special relationship to Yahweh);
4. Affirm the dominant interpretation of the Law;
5. Affirm that the Kingdom belongs to the pure, righteous, and holy among the children of Abraham;
6. Possibly affirm the existing Jewish power structures/rulers (or not, depending upon your perspective and who you were);
7. Do mighty deeds and signs that confirmed Yahweh was with him.

John the Baptist heralds the coming King and Kingdom:

- Mt. 3, Mk. 1, Jn. 1, Lk. 3: John the Baptist is the Voice of Isaiah 40 heralding the end of exile, Yahweh's return, and the Kingdom.
- Jesus, as the Mighty One, follows John the Baptist (Mk. 1) as the Herald/Voice, preaching that the kingdom had come in himself: "The Kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe in the gospel!" (Mk. 1:15)
- If the above historical reality about Israel's continuing sense of exile was indeed true, then when John and Jesus began preaching that the long awaited Kingdom had come in Jesus and this was being confirmed through mighty deeds and signs, Israel's hopes of the end of exile and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God would have been piqued immensely.

BUT... Jesus does not conform to the dominant kingdom narrative.

Jesus' subversion of the dominant kingdom narrative of the first-century:

1. Israel's true enemies were not flesh and blood but sin, Satan, and death (Mt. 4, 12:26-29, 12:43-45; Lk. 10:18, 11:14-26; Jn. 8:31-48).
2. Israel's current leaders were acting as the real oppressors of Israel and the coming Kingdom (Mt. 23; Lk. 11:37-54).
3. The Son/Messiah had come to serve and sacrifice rather than with a will to power (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Mt. 11:28; Jn. 13).
4. Messiah Jesus denounces Pharisaic interpretation of Law (Mt. 5; Mk. 7).
5. Jesus pronounces judgment on the Temple (Mt. 21:12-24:34; Mk. 11:12-13:37).
6. Jesus invites all to come to the Kingdom (Gentiles, Samaritans, sinners, tax collectors, harlots) and rejects those who see themselves as kingdom worthy (Lk. 19:1-10; Mk. 2:14-22; Jn. 4, etc.)

The prophetic picture of the Kingdom re-visited in Jesus:

1. Jesus defeats the real enemies of Yahweh (sin, Satan, death).
2. Yahweh returns to Zion (Jesus in Jerusalem during the final week of Passover speaking authoritatively over Jerusalem and the Temple and predicting judgment).
3. Jesus' rule/throne as the Son of David would not be located by a particular geography in Jerusalem, but rather "at the right hand of God."
4. Jesus (and his followers) becomes the new Temple.
5. Jesus' mighty deeds and signs bring Yahweh's healing to the lost of Israel (and Jesus' disciples' ministry continues this shalom with "greater deeds than these").
6. Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant through his death (symbolized and spoken of at the Last Supper).
7. Jesus sends the promised Spirit of Yahweh (Acts 2).
8. Jesus reconstitutes true Israel around himself (chooses the 12 disciples; proclaims that his family are those who "do the will of God").