

Kingdom and Covenant in the New Testament

Lesson 2

The Kingdom of God

Forum



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Lesson Two: The Kingdom of God

Discussion Forum

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Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

Question 1:

What is the gospel of the kingdom?

Dr. Craig S. Keener

When we speak of the gospel of the kingdom, or the good news of God's reign, it helps us to think about what early believers — for whom the Bible was the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament — would have thought of. In Isaiah 52, God announces that he's going to restore his people, and he says that "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who bring glad tidings, saying to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" And it's said to be good news of peace. So, it's good news of God's peace. It's good news of God's reign. It's good news that God is saving his people, that God is acting on behalf of his people to bring in righteousness and justice in the world. And there is a consummation that we look forward to with that. But we understand that a bit differently than many of Jesus' contemporaries did because we also know that the kingdom comes in two stages. Because the King who is yet to come and consummate his kingdom has already come, the Messiah has already come. The first fruits of the resurrection that we anticipate in the future, the first fruits have already happened. So, because Jesus has already come, the kingdom is "already, not yet," and we already have a foretaste of God's activity in the world. In fact, the signs and the wonders that Jesus was doing, there's coming a day when there's going to be no more sorrow. There's going to be no more pain. God's going to heal everything. But, already, when Jesus came the first time, he gave us a sample of that, a foretaste as he was healing people and doing his marvelous works. They were a foretaste of something that we'll experience more fully in the kingdom in its fullness.

Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

We hear from time to time the biblical phrase "the gospel of the kingdom." For starters, we should remember that the word "gospel" means "good news." And so, this is an invitation, really, to reflect on why the announcement of the kingdom is, in fact, good news. And, number one, it's good news because it's real. And second, it is guaranteed in its fulfillment. So, there's a concrete anchor for looking forward to it, leaning into it,

feeling the anticipation of it. But what makes the kingdom good news is the intrinsic quality of it. It manages power in ways that are so dramatically opposed to rulerships and organizations with which we are familiar that it's been rightly called "the upside-down kingdom." And another thing that, if we go back all the way to Calvin, he once said, "You need to understand about the kingdom of God that it's not an ego trip" — I'm paraphrasing, of course — "but he rules more for our sakes than his own." And the whole idea of "kingdom," if we're caught in prejudices of it being egocentric for the ruler or dominating and coercive, we miss the point that the king rules for our sake, creating safe space for human flourishing. For this and many other reasons, it is indeed a gospel, a "good news of the kingdom."

Dr. Mark L. Strauss

It's universally recognized that Jesus' essential message was, "The kingdom of God is at hand." And Mark tells us, in Mark 1:14, 15, that Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. And that word "good news" or "gospel" comes right out of Isaiah. Isaiah predicted that one day there would be the announcement that God's salvation had arrived. So, it is, the good news is ultimately related to the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of God is related to God's sovereign authority and rule and dominion. The kingdom of God has multiple meanings. It can mean God's overall sovereign rule over all of creation, or it can refer to his specific rule over the world when God reestablishes his reign, the consummation of his kingdom. Since human beings are in rebellion against God, have rejected God's authority, God promised in the Old Testament — we were just talking about Isaiah — in Isaiah's prophecies, to one day reestablish his relationship with his people, to reconcile them to himself, to reestablish his authority and dominion and kingdom. And so, the promise of the kingdom is the promise that God is going to reestablish his dominion and authority. The good news is the announcement that the time has arrived, that God's kingdom is at hand.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

What does it mean when we say the gospel of the kingdom? "Gospel" literally means "good news." It's a proclamation of something that's happened. It's a gospel of the kingdom, and the kingdom referred to is the kingdom of God. It's the long-expected reign of God that would bring his presence among his people, judgment upon the wicked, salvation for the righteous. But it's principally an announcement of the state of affairs that God's reign has become. As Isaiah the prophet said, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news."

Question 2: **What is the kingdom of God?**

Dr. Dan Lacich

When we try to understand the kingdom of God, it's a tough concept for a lot of people today, for modern folks, if you will, because very few of us have ever lived in a kingdom. It's especially difficult if you are in a country that once had a king and you got rid of the

king, because that has negative connotations. We don't want kings. When we do think about "kingdom," oftentimes it's geographic. We think of the boundaries, the national boundaries that a king would oversee. And that, on one level, helps us understand the kingdom of God, but it really doesn't get to the heart of it all. At the root of a kingdom is the relationship between a king and his subjects. And wherever those subjects are living in allegiance to the king, well, the king's rule extends to that place. So, when we think about the kingdom of God, it is everywhere that Christ followers are, because they have an allegiance to the king, they are living under the authority of the king, and so they extend that influence of their king into the world every day. In one sense, it is geographic in that the entire creation comes under God's rule. But when we look at the New Testament and its relationship to us as believers, it's really about our relationship to Christ our King, our obedience to him. The old word would have been "fealty," that we have this relationship where we honor and respect and obey the king and, therefore, the king reigns and rules in our lives and where we are.

Dr. Aida Besancon Spencer

The kingdom of God is such a major theme in the Gospels. Right now I'm teaching the gospel of Luke, and Jesus proclaimed it, and his disciples proclaimed it; John the Baptist proclaimed it; Paul proclaimed it. So, I always think of, how do you enter it? And to enter it you have two basic thoughts. One is, you have to repent, and the other, you have to take on the kingdom of God. So, you have to repent, you have to turn your life around; you have to consider that what you have been, in light of who God is, is wanting. And then the second part is taking on the kingdom of God, or it can be the dominion of God, or the reign of God, following what God wants in your life. So, we have examples of what Jesus did, how he preached it, and how all the different people that he reached toward in order to encourage them to become pleasing to God in their lives.

Dr. Stephen E. Witmer

The kingdom of God refers not in the first instance to a place but rather to God's reign, to his dynamic rule over his people. So, in the Old Testament it is realized that God is the king. God is known as King. He reigns over all the earth. And yet, at the very same time, even though God was king, God's people knew he wasn't fully exercising his reign, so the righteous suffered and the wicked seemed to be prospering. And so there's this hope that grew up in the prophets that in the last days God would fully assert his reign, he would bring his kingdom, and at that time he would vindicate his people and he would judge his enemies. So, the kingdom of God is really where God asserts his kingship, his authority, his reign.

Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

The language of kingdom may seem a little archaic today and maybe even odd to people who have turned their backs on human monarchies. But the reign of God, the kingdom of God, is a marvelous vision of a sphere in which God's will, God's prescriptive will, is now normative, and not only practiced in the outward dynamics of that society and culture but is owned in the hearts and minds of, and will of all its constituent members. This kingdom of God is one characterized by *shalom* and blessedness and righteousness

and peace and joy. It is the fulfillment of all our deepest longings in human relationships and in life together.

Question 3:

How did hope for the coming kingdom of God develop through the Old Testament prophets?

Dr. Constantine Campbell

The Old Testament prophets give us a picture of the kingdom of God, on the one hand, by looking at the kingdom of God as it exists in their own time in the nation of Israel. And it's flawed, but we see the promises of God fulfilled in certain ways, but also the judgment of God in exile and so on. And we see a hope projected for the future where the same pattern of the kingdom, where "God will rule over his people in his place" is projected in such a way that God's people will be no longer under threat from other nations, will be universal, in fact, throughout the world, and the rule of God would be uncompromised and no longer under competition with kings of Assyria or Babylon or anywhere else. So, the Old Testament prophets take the shape of the kingdom of God, as they experience it and as Israel has experienced it in their own history, and project a future to a time when God will bring it about in perfection.

Dr. Alvin Padilla, translation

When we read the prophets of the Old Testament, we realize that the people of Israel had strayed from their call to be a light for other nations. In the book of Amos, we realize that the people had fallen greatly. Most of Amos' book is a series of complaints, lamentations and condemnations to the people because they had strayed so far that they had forgotten about their relationship with God and had oppressed people poorer than themselves. But at the end of his book, Amos renewed the hope that the Lord would fulfill his promise in his coming kingdom, a land where justice would survive no matter what. All of the prophets, whether it was Isaiah, Jeremiah or Micah, placed an emphasis on the idea that the people had failed, and were unable to live the life that the Lord demanded from those who were called his sons and daughters. Amos renewed the hope that the Lord himself would bring the kingdom of God. The prophet Jeremiah emphasized that the old covenant had failed because the law was not in the hearts of the people. But in 31:33 of the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah emphasizes that in the last days the Lord himself will put his word, his covenant, in our hearts and then the kingdom of God will be within us. We have the hope that the kingdom of God is a reality and that, as his children, we live the reality of the kingdom of God right now. Of course, the future will be far more glorious than the present.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

The concept of the kingdom of God is actually not used very often in the Old Testament, which is quite interesting. To understand the kingdom of God, though, you do have to think about, what does kingship mean? Where does it begin? And then, from understanding kingship, and Davidic kingship in particular, that then leads to a concept of

the kingdom of God. So, Davidic kingship, way back in the book of Genesis 17, God promises Abraham that kings will come forth from you. And then, in Genesis 49:10, it talks about Judah in particular, which is the fourth born son of Jacob, that Judah is going to be the royal line. And, of course, this theme runs throughout the Old Testament, that the tribe of Judah, or the Lion of Judah. It's especially picked up with David in 1 Samuel 16 when David, who's from Bethlehem, is anointed king by Samuel. This really marks a significant turning point in the story of the Old Testament. But then what happens is when David does become king, — and it takes a good few years before that happens — when he becomes king, God makes promises to him in 2 Samuel 7, and the promises actually concern his son. And here's where the kingdom of God idea comes in. So, God promises that, "When your days are complete" — in other words, when you've died — God says, "I will raise up your seed after you ... and I will establish his kingdom as an everlasting kingdom ... and I will establish his throne as an everlasting throne." So, that's in 2 Samuel. So, clearly Davidic kingship is promised by God, and it's going to be this everlasting kingship. But what's interesting is in Chronicles, when the same passage in 1 Chronicles 17, when the same passage is quoted, now you get "my kingdom," God says — when he quotes about David — it's now said to be "*my* kingdom and *my* throne." So, you see the connection between the Davidic king and the throne. Then in 1 Chronicles 28, when Solomon is anointed king, and David actually quotes it and David says that, "God has set you as king *over* the throne of the Lord and the kingdom of the Lord." And Chronicles, there's about five other passages that Chronicles mention that. So, what you're starting to see in Chronicles is connecting the concept of the kingdom of God with the Davidic king ... But what the prophets will say, that in view of the failure of the Davidic kings, many of them, that there starts to be this hope that God will raise up a righteous Davidic king. And Jeremiah is going to say this. And Jeremiah, in spite of the fact that the kingdom is about to come to an end, he says that as surely as God has made a covenant with his son, that he has established his son on the throne. So, this becomes a very important hope throughout the Old Testament, but especially with the prophets, and they're waiting for God to raise up a righteous Davidic king. Just one more comment with this. So, when Jesus turns up and he's hailed, "son of David," which of course points him back to this Davidic promise — and Matthew's genealogy does the same thing — this king dies on a cross, and it looks like the promise of the kingdom has come to an end. But God had promised David, he said, "I will raise up your seed after you." Now, the term there "to raise up" in Hebrew is just an ordinary *qum*, it's an ordinary Hebrew verb. But the Greek is the same word for "resurrect." So, the resurrection of the Messiah is actually the place where his kingship is being established, and this gets picked up in both Peter's sermons and in Paul's sermons in the book of Acts. And they quote, "This Jesus who died on the cross, God raised him up in fulfillment of his promise to David," in 2 Samuel, that he will always have a son to sit on the throne, because Jesus is the only righteous Davidic king.

Dr. Tom Petter

Well, the hope for the coming of God's kingdom in the Old Testament is primarily through the prophets. And when you think about God's kingdom, you really have to think about kings, kingship, kingdom. You don't have a kingdom without a king. And so, a lot of what the prophets talk about, both the minor prophets and the major prophets, the

longer ones and the shorter ones, those who address this question of the kingdom of God, they're going to talk about a king. And so, some of the prophets are very specific and others, they're more general. Amos will talk about a sanctuary that is to come. But then you've got Isaiah in the eighth century B.C., and he really hammers the idea of a king in his kingdom. And it's more than that, it's a son, because in the ancient Near East whenever you have a king and a kingdom, they're begotten of the gods, and the ideal king is the deified king, the one who is a god-king. And so, of course, Isaiah is all over that, because he's going to say, very early, there's going to be a son, a Davidic son, in the dynasty of David, which is the main dynasty of the kings in ancient Israel. And this son — actually, he's going to say something radical, which is not radical in the ancient world — he's going to say he's a God-King. He's the Eternal Father, the Almighty God, but he's the son of the ultimate God. So, that's the ideal. And very quickly you realize that this king, especially in Isaiah — again, Isaiah is the most specific of the prophets to announce this kingdom of God and this king — this king is actually going to be a mighty warrior, which is typical also of the ancient world, but he's also filled with wisdom. That's chapter 11 of Isaiah. He has all the spirits of God: wisdom, knowledge, understanding. He is the king that was the wisest of them all, greater than Solomon, because Solomon failed at the end of his life. He failed in his own wisdom to be faithful to his wife and not to accumulate wealth, not to accumulate horses, like Deuteronomy 17 says. And so this coming king for Isaiah is the perfect, obedient king. But he is also the perfect sacrifice. And that's the connection, right? The king becomes a sacrifice. Why is that? Because the king has a dwelling, he has a palace, and this palace is also a temple, and he is the administrator of the sacrifices. You look at David, you look at Solomon, they perform sacrifices there, but they can never atone for sin. So the radical solution that Isaiah proposes is that this king, who is God himself, will sacrifice the perfect sacrifice to secure righteousness in the city. And, of course, the perfect sacrifice is himself. And so, there you have it. And clearly the Gospels, that's their entire focus. The king has come and he sacrifices himself on behalf of the people.

Question 4:

How did Jesus' contemporaries distinguish between “this age” and the “age to come”?

Dr. Sean McDonough

Well, if we're thinking about Jesus and his contemporaries and how they distinguished this age and the age to come, we assume that that's going to mean Jesus' Jewish contemporaries. And even there, we don't want to think of a monolithic Judaism where everyone thought precisely the same thing and then typically set that over and against Jesus, who remarkably believed differently in every respect. There's plenty of continuity between Jesus and his contemporaries. Probably the thing that's most important to stress is that Israel is going to be at the center of the theological vision of most of Jesus' contemporaries. And so, the restoration of Israel, the restitution of Israel, the fact that Israel, in contrast to its present situation, will be on top rather than on the bottom, that would have dominated the eschatological vision of Jesus' more Bible-believing

contemporaries. I mean, there's people like the Sadducees who might not have made much distinction at all between this age and the age to come, but your Pharisees and your Essenes and all these other groups, they would have been looking for something to change for Israel. Now, of course, ultimately you've got the resurrection, which is probably still Israel-focused, and anything that's in the Old Testament is always going to be fair game for a Bible-believing Jew to believe. So, the resurrection, the fructification and exuberant blessings on the earth, all those sort of things would be part of the package and are happily brought into the Christian faith as well.

Dr. Stephen E. Witmer

So, Jesus' contemporaries understood the whole of history to be divided into two ages: "this age," and "the age to come." "This age" is the age of suffering, death, persecution sometimes for God's people, God's people struggle, even the righteous don't prosper ... "The age to come" is understood as the time where God finally vindicates his suffering people, where righteousness is established, where God judges his enemies in the end. And so, there's a huge disjunct between this age and the age to come. Jesus himself thought in these terms, so he talks about those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, there's not forgiveness for them in this age or the age to come. The apostle Paul, in Galatians 1, says that Jesus gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age. So the New Testament authors themselves are thinking in these terms. And it really is, I think, both a realistic and a hopeful view of history. So, it's realistic because Jesus and his fellow New Testament authors recognize that we're not in the age to come yet. God's people are not vindicated; God's people often suffer. And yet, at the same time, it's hopeful because the age to come is coming. It's going to come. God's people will be saved.

Question 5:

What do theologians mean by the term "inaugurated eschatology?"

Dr. Constantine Campbell

The term "inaugurated eschatology" refers to the overlap of two ages: the old and the new coexisting at the same time. The reason that the New Testament speaks like this about our eschatology, or the overlapping of the ages, is because, as the apostle Paul realized, a man has risen from the dead in the middle of time. And the significance of that is resurrection from the dead was supposed to happen at the end of time. And so, when Paul encounters the risen Jesus on the Damascus road, he realizes the end has come and broken into our current age and so that both ages exist together at the same time, which is why Paul can say, on the one hand, we are stuck in the flesh that is subject to sin, but on the other hand, we live by the Spirit who is a sign of the age to come and will one day come in full when the old is done away with completely. Only the new will remain.

Dr. Dan Lacich

When we talk about eschatology, most people think about events that will happen right at the very end; it's something off in the future. Eschatology means "end times," so I

understand that. We think about the end. But “inaugurated eschatology” has more of the sense of the end times are now; they’ve already begun. And I think one of the key passages to look at to understand this goes back to Pentecost. You know, Peter stands up on Pentecost, preaches, and makes a quote from the prophet Joel about the Holy Spirit coming and being poured out upon people and that this will happen in the latter days. And then Peter says, “This is that. What just happened here at Pentecost is that pouring out of the Holy Spirit that will happen in the latter days.” So, in Peter’s mind, with that sermon, he’s saying we’re living in the end times, it’s been inaugurated, it has already begun. You know, the final events have already been put in place, and things are in motion for the eventual return of Christ and the consummation of all things. So, end times, eschatology is not just a distant future thing. It’s something that really began to pick up speed, if you will, with the crucifixion, resurrection, and then the ascension of Christ, and then the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Mark A. Jennings

You’ll hear theologians use this term, “inaugurated eschatology.” And what they’re referring to is a way of understanding what the New Testament writers were depicting when they talked about the significance of Jesus’ first advent, his coming, his death on the cross, and his resurrection. And the relationship that that had with the way the end of things were considered, or the last age — “the *eschaton*” is the sort of technical term — the age of the Messiah, the messianic kingdom. And what these theologians find in the New Testament is that there’s a tension, that there is, on the one hand, what seems to be statements of the full arrival of the messianic kingdom, that it’s here, that it’s come, that the aspects that were associated with this great anticipated age — the presence of the Holy Spirit, the nations coming to worship God, the resurrection occurring — that those items were supposed to be part of “the coming of this age.” And so, in a sense, it has begun. It has been *inaugurated* is the idea. But at the same time, believers feel the tension of this brokenness of creation. People still get sick. People still die. People still sin. Satan is still unbound. There is this aspect of how this kingdom isn’t fully here yet, or fully *consummated* is the idea, that the wicked age still exists. And so, this teaching in the New Testament where you’ll have, for example, Paul talk about salvation and redemption and reconciliation as if it’s already occurred, and then almost immediately speak to it as if it’s coming, gets into this idea of what is called “inaugurated eschatology.” You’ll also hear it referred to as “already, not yet.” It’s already happened, but it’s not yet happened, or not yet fully arrived. And this concept that the New Testament writers have is in stark contrast to what you would see in mainstream Second Temple Judaism, especially in the Pharisees. The idea was that there was a wicked age, and at the end of the wicked age would come the messianic age. And it’s just basically two ages. But what the New Testament speaks to is that there’s a wicked age, and into this age comes the age of the Messiah, but for a while there’s an overlap; there’s a living in between both ages. Now, the wicked age is destined to fall away and we look forward towards when there’ll only be the full kingdom. Jesus speaks to this in the Gospel of John. Think about the story of when Lazarus is dead and Jesus’ coming is going to raise him out of the grave, and before he gets there Lazarus’ sister, Martha, comes to him and is pleading with Jesus, “If you’d only been here things would have been different.” And Jesus says to her, “Your brother will rise again.” And she says, “I know, I know, on the last day.” She’s working within

that eschatology idea of a wicked age, and that at the end will be the new age when the resurrection occurs. But Jesus wants her to understand so much more, wants us to understand so much more, that it isn't at the end of history, that, when this resurrection will occur, but that it's actually in the middle of history and it's occurring in Jesus, in his coming, that he is the resurrection, that he brings this new age. And I think this impacts us as believers, that we don't think of eternal life as something that *will* happen. We don't think of the kingdom as something *yet* to come, but that we already are enjoying the eternal age, we already are living in this kingdom. And at the same time we yearn and we hope for that great second advent, that second day when Christ comes in his glory, when the inaugurated eschatology gives way to *just* the kingdom of God.

Dr. Stephen E. Witmer

“Eschatology” refers to the last things, so the last days, the age to come, the kingdom of God. And “inaugurated” refers to the fact that these things have begun already. Inaugurated is different from consummated. It's not fully here, but it's partially here. It's already here in principle. So, “inaugurated eschatology” is the viewpoint of the New Testament that, surprisingly, the last days have begun with the first coming of Jesus. And we see this throughout the teaching of Jesus and throughout the entire New Testament. So, Jesus says — he's talking about his ability to cast out demons — and he says, “If I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” — past tense. It's already here. The writer of Hebrews says, “In these last days,” referring to his own time period. Now, Paul says, “The ends of the age have come upon us.” And Peter, the apostle Peter, in his Pentecost sermon quotes the Old Testament prophet Joel, prophesying things that are going to happen in the last days, and says, “This is coming to fulfillment already in our day; the last days are here.” So, the teaching of the New Testament is that the last days, the age to come, the kingdom of God, has come already in part — not fully, but in part. Maybe a helpful illustration of this would be a tic-tac-toe game, or knots and crosses for people from the U.K. You can get, as you're playing tic-tac-toe, you can get to a point if you play your moves right and the other player plays his moves wrong, where the game is won in principle. If you play out the rest of the game properly, it doesn't matter what your opponent does, you're going to win the game. And so, if I held a board up like that to you and said, “Is this game over or is it not over?” the answer would be yes and no at the same time. The victory is achieved in principle, but you still need to play out the victory. And similarly, at his first coming through his life, death, resurrection, Jesus already has won the decisive victory over sin, Satan, death, but it's not fully implemented yet. Jesus needs to come again a second time. And this was totally scandalous for the people of Jesus' day. Jewish people of his day understood the kingdom of God as a fireworks display of God's judgment and wrath and vindication for his people. And Jesus comes saying the kingdom of God is here, and yet history is continuing on as it always was. And Jesus doesn't back away from this scandalous teaching. He presses in on it. He gives parables of the mustard seed, a little bit of leaven. He says the kingdom of God is like a little bit of leaven that's hidden in a lump. For Jews to hear that the kingdom of God is hidden would be unthinkable. But Jesus... this is very important for Jesus and his first coming to teach that the kingdom of God is here even though it's not fully here.

Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

When we run across this term “eschatology,” we are concerning ourselves with the biblical disclosure of what lies ahead, the future, God’s plan for the linear progression of time. “Inaugurated eschatology” means that we envision God’s plan for the future still incomplete. Not everything has fallen into place in perfect and complete fulfillment of the glorious promises. And yet, the inaugurated piece is the assurance that we’re not waiting for the beginning of the fulfillment of his promises, but we have seen that beginning; it has been launched. It has been launched decisively, most decisively in the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. And so we are kind of in between the launch and the completion. This is what the term “inaugurated eschatology” is all about. It’s very full of hope and expectation, but also confidence because we’ve seen the down payment on what’s ahead.

Dr. Joel C. Hunter

What do theologians mean by the term, “inaugurated eschatology?” ... It’s really a great term because eschatology, or the study of the end times, the study of the last things, is usually parsed by many people as that which we wait for. And that which we debate and we argue about *ad nauseam*, you know, and we go through the pre-mil and post-mil and a-mil and, you know, all of these, all of these different scenarios of how the end times are going to happen. And the discussions are much more detailed and distracting than fruitful. But when you realize that the eschatology is already here, that is, when Jesus came and established in fullness, he fulfilled those things that had been prepared in the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophecies, and when he came he said, “I came not to abolish the law but to fulfill the law,” and he established incarnate, in the flesh, the beginning of the kingdom of God, then you realize everything from then on is living out the kingdom as it is supposed to be. He taught us to pray this great prayer: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is heaven.” And so, we have this perspective of the end that we’re supposed to be living by right now. We have a power in the end that is ours right now. We have a purpose and an agenda that we have somehow gathered up into, “Boy, things are going to be great after we die,” when it was really meant to be an in-breaking of the future *while we live*. And that is what is called inaugurated eschatology. The inauguration has happened, the kingdom of God is here, and we are walking out that which God has for us even as we live today.

Question 6:

How was Jesus victorious over the enemies of God’s kingdom in the inauguration of God’s kingdom?

Dr. Constantine Campbell

God is victorious over his enemies through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. In the death of Christ, by dealing with human sin and paying the penalty for sin, he has overpowered sin and, therefore, the power that sin might have over us. Once sin is dealt with, then the power of death is conquered because sin and death work together. Sin is kind of like the stinger that death has, and once it stings you with sin, once you sin,

then you are subjected to death, and you belong to death... But if you break that stinger, as Jesus did on the cross, then death can no longer hold you. It's like a toothless viper, or a spider whose fangs have been broken off. And so, what follows after the death of Jesus is the resurrection of Jesus, which is the vindication of his right standing with God and that sin has been conquered. And his ascension to God's right hand is described in the New Testament as the final sign that he is victorious over his enemies, not only sin and death, but the authorities, powers and dominions as mentioned, say, in Ephesians 1, they are under his feet now, they're already conquered. Nevertheless, they still exist, and so, at the end of Ephesians in chapter 6, we see that believers do spiritual warfare with them, but we battle with a team that's already lost, and we are just waiting for the final siren to sound, and then the game is over. We already know we're on the winning side.

Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

In Jesus' coming, it's very clear that the New Testament says that he inaugurates God's kingdom. God's kingdom is rooted and grounded in the Old Testament. Indeed, it goes all the way back to Adam as a vice-regent who is, as representative of the human race, is to rule over God's creation and indeed all of us as human beings are to do that. But because of sin, he does not do that. Sin enters the world, which then becomes not only that which is transmitted to all of us, but also in Scripture is described as a power, as a domain. Sin leads to death so that in our lives we ultimately die because we are sinners before God. It means that we are now under God's judgment because of our sin before God. And it also means that, as a result of sin, the ruler of this world, tied to Satan and his realm, is that which we are now under his power and rule. We're part of his kingdom, not the kingdom of God. And as you work through the Old Testament, the Old Testament anticipates the saving reign of God breaking into this world, that God himself in and through his Messiah will accomplish that saving reign and defeat the kingdom of Satan. He will defeat the powers of death. He will do that through, ultimately, the payment of sin and our restoration and reconciliation with God. Now, when it comes to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ now comes as the second Adam, he comes as the Lord himself, fully God, fully man. He is the one who, in his ministry, brings the kingdom to pass, not only in his teaching but his miracles, but supremely in his cross where sin then is dealt with first and foremost. The power of sin, the penalty of sin is removed; it's paid for. Death, then, is defeated, evidenced in his glorious resurrection and ascension and pouring out the Spirit. The realm of Satan now over us is now defeated as we are now transferred from Adam to Christ, from the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of the ruler of this air to that of the kingdom of God. And in all these ways, through the life, death, resurrection, ascension, the pouring out of the Spirit, the inauguration of the kingdom which is now here, yet we await its consummation in the future, he has defeated the powers, he has defeated sin, death, the Evil One, and we are now victorious in Christ.

Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

The final conquests that are necessary for the perfection of God's kingdom remain ahead, but they have begun, and they were decisively inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. And we get some clue to what the inaugurating assault on the enemies of the kingdom looks like when we consider the text from Isaiah that he chose to speak from in the synagogue in Nazareth when he launched his earthly ministry. One of the decisive

enemies of the kingdom of God is the rulers of darkness and the principalities and powers that do not give up their turf without a fight. Jesus launched a massive assault on them. And the New Testament celebrates, really, the intimidation that the greater strength of Jesus Christ created in the powers of darkness. And what this means to believers is that we are no longer under the dominion of fear, fear of evil spirits, fear of death, fear of the control of the bondage to sin. All of these things were, in the inaugurating ministry of Jesus Christ, assaulted in a decisive way, and began, then, the dismantling of the structures of injustice and deceit and lies that perpetuate the forces of darkness and their stranglehold on human nature. He spoke truth. He assaulted the gates of hell himself and then empowers his liberated followers to continue that assault on the road to complete victory.

Question 7:

How will Jesus' victory over his enemies be complete when he returns?

Dr. Richard Lints

The reality of Jesus' final victory lives in the shadow now of victory which doesn't seem complete. We live in the midst of great conflict and tension, suffering, persecution, and so it's a natural question for us to ask, how will that change? We want to affirm that Jesus' return will be different than his first coming, that his return brings closure, brings finality to the questions of justice, that everything will be put right. In part, we trust that, though we do not see that. We trust it because God is God, that he will at the end of time, so to speak, that is, at the end of creaturely experience of time in its corrupted state, God will bring perfect justice. God will execute judgment perfectly. He will not judge harshly. He will judge in accordance with the standards of justice. So, all of death itself will be defeated. All of our own idolatries will be defeated. Everything will be put right. And there is no greater yearning in the human heart for that reality, and it is no mistake that we yearn for it because it shall come to pass as God so designs.

Dr. Stephen E. Witmer

So, with Jesus' first coming, he did not consummate his victory. He established a victory, he secured a victory, but he hasn't fully implemented that victory yet. So, he hasn't returned, he hasn't completely defeated his enemies, and yet already, through his ministry, his life, his death, his resurrection, he has achieved a victory over his enemy. So, death is defeated because Jesus came, died, and then rose again. He has defeated death. Satan is defeated because Satan's real power over believers is to be able to accuse them of sin and its consequences. And Jesus, by bearing God's wrath at the cross has deprived Satan of his grounds of accusation. So, already, even though it's not consummated, he's inaugurated a great victory for believers.

Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

I think we have every right to dream of that day when the kingdom of God is fulfilled in its entirety, and our experience of life, restored and renewed life, will be what God intended for us. In many ways, the journey back to the completion of God's perfected

kingdom is a journey back to Eden, to linking back to what we lost in the Fall, and perhaps making it not only equal to that in a restored way, but better than ever. Jesus came to save us from sin, and that full restoration will involve a complete liberation from the guilt of sin, which we experience by justification now; deliverance from the power of sin, which we will continue to struggle with to some degree in this life; and most of all, it will involve a complete deliverance from all the consequences of sin, which is a category that encompasses not just death but all the dysfunction, all the pain, all the woundedness that is our human plight in this life flawed by sin. So, what we look forward to is a comprehensive restoration project, a complete salvation from the guilt, the power, *and* the comprehensive consequence of sin — back to Eden through Jesus Christ.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

When Jesus returns, we see the completion of his victory, and we see the benefits that his followers gain at that time. The New Testament picture is really one that begins even as early as Psalm 2 where the nations conspire against the Lord and his Anointed One, but blessed are those who take refuge in the son, who kiss the son, but over his enemies he will rule with a rod of iron. And so, at the end of the New Testament, particularly in the book of Revelation, we see the risen Christ, the one who was dead but now is alive forevermore. He's the slain and standing Lamb next to the Father in Revelation 5, and his victory means the complete conquest of all the enemies of God's people and his. But that victory will be achieved in two ways: through gospel conquest, meaning gathering all those for whom he died to himself, and also the utter defeat and eternal punishment of those who remain opposed to him and his coming. And as we live as Christians looking for that victory to be completed, we have to remember we don't always know the difference, in fact, we never know for sure the difference between those whom Christ will conquer through the gospel versus those who he will conquer with the rod of iron, which is why our battle is not against flesh and blood but against dark forces and why we preach the gospel instead of bear the sword for the name of Christ.

Question 8:

**Can the doctrine of substitutionary atonement be held alongside
Christus Victor theology?**

Dr. Gordon Isaac

Let's talk about the theories of the atonement. In general there are three. One could talk about more, but there are three doctrines, or three theories of the doctrine of the atonement. The first is substitutionary atonement. In the twelfth century, St. Anselm developed a theory of the atonement in which he saw sin was a violation against the honor of God and it needed to be restored. And so, in developing his theory, he said, "We need to find someone who can repay this debt. It can't be an angel. It can't be a mere man. Indeed, it must be God himself." *Cur Deus Homo — Why did God Become Man?* That was Anselm's answer, and he thought that the sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to restore the honor of God. The second view of the atonement, we could say, was also developed in the twelfth century by Peter Abelard, a *brilliant* theologian, who, when

looking upon Anselm's theory of the atonement, thought it insufficient. He thought, "You know, this really makes God something of a cosmic accountant. He's worried about these debts and things. It just seems not a worthy thing to think of with respect to God." And he was convinced that, really much more important than having the death of an innocent person being added on top of the sin of the world, he thought, really, what was happening is that Jesus, in his filial obedience to God, showed us the right path. And then when we look upon the works of Jesus, our hearts are transfixed and transformed so that we now, in our turn, follow after Jesus in that kind of moral, ethical approach. So his view could be called the "moral theory" of the atonement. There's a third theory of the atonement: *Christus Victor*. And in this *ancient* theory of the atonement, the early church fathers loved to talk about how Christ had had total victory over the forces of sin, death, and the Devil — the "evil triumvirate" we could call it — and so, they delighted in talking about how Jesus was something of the bait on the hook, and the Devil came along and got a mouthful. But Jesus, being of divine nature, could not be held back by sin and broke through the boundaries and thus won victory for all mankind.

Dr. Constantine Campbell

Not only can penal substitutionary atonement be held alongside *Christus Victor* theology, but they must be held together. Jesus's death does not only have significance for human beings, it has significance for the entire created cosmos. This is what we see in the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, that, in the cross, the evil supernatural powers, the thrones, dominions and authorities of darkness are overthrown and put on public display — Colossians 2:15 — they're a public spectacle. The reason they are overthrown is because Jesus has dealt finally with human sin. Once human sin is dealt with and done away with, then those powers of darkness, the spiritual forces of evil can no longer control us. They no longer have a claim over our lives, and so, in that way, they are overthrown.

Dr. Eckhard J. Schnabel

The death of Jesus, and Jesus himself, is interpreted in the New Testament in different ways. We are sometimes tempted, perhaps especially in the U.S., to boil down everything to a simple slogan. Preferably, it has to be so brief that it fits on a mug, at least on a T-shirt. And that can cause problems when we discuss the Bible where, like when we look at Jesus, for example, and how Jesus is interpreted, different areas of life, different metaphors are used. Different biblical traditions are used to understand what happened when Jesus died on the cross, what happened when Jesus came to this earth, lived his life, died on the cross and then rose from the dead. And so, one interpretation interprets Jesus' death as a sacrifice. In the Old Testament, animals were sacrificed; animals had to die so that the human sinner did not have to die, because for sins, especially serious sins in the Old Testament, there is death. And, as we learn in Genesis 3, for every sin there needs to be death. And so, animals were sacrificed where the animal took the place of the sinner. This would be called "substitutionary atonement." The animal is the substitute of the sinner. Another thought that is actually linked with this idea is representation, that the animal represents the sinner as the animal dies and is presented to God. And so, Jesus' death is interpreted in many passages in the New Testament as a sacrifice. And when we have sacrificial language in a church context, then we have the context of substitution.

Forgiveness, in the New Testament, is not amnesty, that God simply decides not to punish. When, in the U.S., there are too many people in prison, more prisons are being built. In Italy, if there are too many people in prisons, they issue an amnesty, and so people are released who have to do only one or two years. So, they are just forgiven in the sense that they don't have to spend the time in prison; they don't have to suffer the entire punishment that they were condemned to. But this is not what God is doing. Sin has to be punished because sin is serious. Sin is an attack against the character of God. But in the Old Testament, God made it possible for sins to be forgiven by sin being placed on animals, and so animals took the place of the sinner. And this is used to interpret the death of Jesus. There were no human sacrifices in the Old Testament, so this is completely unique. It was unexpected. There was no Old Testament passage that clearly indicated that this is what would happen. There is Isaiah 53 where the servant of the Lord suffers and dies, but if one reads Isaiah 53 as a Jew, one could wonder whether this suffering servant is Israel, the people of Israel, or whether it is the prophet. It became, then, clear when Jesus died and was raised from the dead that his death was not a death as the result of his own sin, because he did not sin. So, it was, therefore, possible that God put the sin of the world on Jesus, and so he died instead of us. This is called "substitutionary atonement." At the same time, Jesus then rose from the dead, which means that his death was not a defeat, but it was a victory, a victory over sin and a victory over death. And so, we need to hold both interpretations. We shouldn't neglect one for the benefit of the other. To talk about the *Christus Victor* theme, which means "Christ the warrior, Christ who is victorious," that is somewhat more popular. It's easier to talk about that. Who doesn't like to talk about victories, especially in a culture that is saturated with sports metaphors and sports ideas and sports aficionados? To talk about substitution that someone else dies instead of me, there seems to be even an ethical problem — how could that happen? If I do something wrong, then I need to deal with the consequences. But that is exactly the grace of God, that he allowed Jesus, that he made it possible that Jesus would die for sinners. So, we need to talk about both themes and many others besides.

Dr. Mark L. Strauss

There's a huge debate about the nature of Christ's death on the cross and the atonement — what did Christ accomplish on the cross? And two of the main views are substitutionary atonement, that Christ's death paid the penalty for our sins, he was a sacrifice of atonement. Others argue, however, that Christ's death was really a victory over spiritual forces, over Satan, over sin, over the demons — *Christus Victor* — that he gains the victory over death. Sometimes that's introduced instead of substitutionary atonement. But I think we have to recognize that Christ's death on the cross accomplished a multitude of things. It was victory over sin, over Satan, over death. It paid the penalty for our sins. So, it's not really an either/or. It's not an either/or; it's a both/and when it comes to substitutionary atonement. Yes, Christ paid the penalty for our sins — *Christus Victor*, absolutely yes — Jesus' triumphed over sin, Satan and death at the cross.

Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

Today we may be a little perplexed by the different theories or interpretations of the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Traditionally, evangelical

believers have, along with the apostle Paul, understood the importance of understanding the death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection as a substitutionary atonement for our sins, reconciling us to a holy God. More recently, there has been a movement of recovered enthusiasm for an ancient classic understanding of the atonement, so called, that celebrates *Christus Victor*, or the triumph, the victory of Jesus Christ over all the powers of darkness and the gloom of death. Well, certainly we are wise to join the bandwagon of those who are recovering the *Christus Victor* enthusiasm and rejoice in this mighty triumph of Jesus Christ. All true, but we need to be cautious when people tell us that *Christus Victor* is more an exultant shout of joy that cannot be explained in any meaningful way; it's just a mystery how the death of Christ makes us alive and forgiven. The New Testament has told us a little bit more about how that wonderful dynamic of *Christus Victor* played out. And one of the keys was this, that in order to conquer death, you must first *defang* death. And what is it that gives death its power? The curse of sin. And so, substitutionary atonement is an absolutely indispensable way of recognizing how God made it possible for the dynamics of victory to play out, as indeed they did. So, *Christus Victor* as an emotive theme of rejoicing, yes, but substitutionary atonement as a deep understanding of both the seriousness of sin and the way the victory was wrought.

Dr. James D. Smith III

When I think of the substitutionary atonement, I think of a teaching that's rooted really in the earliest traditions, earliest writings of the church. The classic expression, of course, is by St. Anselm, who died in the early eleven-hundreds, and his work on how, or the manner in which God became human, was a classic statement, the first full-length statement, on the atonements. And there he declares that the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ was brought to bear on this deep problem of our unrighteousness and that the humanity of Christ enabled him to be the perfect substitute, bearing the penalty of our sin. That would make him there on the cross a victim if it weren't for two things: If it weren't for the resurrection, the power of the resurrection, and the victorious appearance of Christ thereafter — that's Easter; that's the good news — and also the fact that it's a victory in that this was a path chosen and affirmed by Christ himself. So, there is a victory in his following this path of obedience, this path of humility, this path of triumph. And that's really what Gustaf Aulen picks up a century ago in his work *Christus Victor*, which, far from portraying Christ as some of the more liberal theologians would, as someone who prophetically challenged the great powers and wound up ground up by them, he says, on the contrary, resurrection victory, the obedience of Christ, his perfections, gained a triumph for us all — *Christus Victor*.

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