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INTRODUCTION

We have an expression in English to describe someone who becomes lost in details. We often say that such a person “can’t see the forest for the trees.” Now, lots of cultures have similar expressions, so it isn’t hard to understand what we mean. It’s easy to become lost in minutia to the point that we can’t see how all of the pieces fit together. So, in many complex and confusing situations like this, we often remind each other to step back and to look at the big picture.

We need to keep this advice in mind when we approach the Old Testament. The details of the Old Testament are so complex that it’s easy to become lost in its many names, places, events, theological teachings and moral instructions. And we lose sight of the underlying unity of the Old Testament. To overcome this problem, we need to step back and to get the big picture that ties all of the Old Testament together.

This is the second lesson in our series, Kingdom, Covenants & Canon of the Old Testament. We’ve entitled this lesson “The Kingdom of God.” God’s kingdom was fundamental to the faith of ancient Israel. So, a proper understanding of the kingdom provides one of the most comprehensive and unifying perspectives we can have on the Old Testament.

Everyone familiar with the Bible knows that the books of the Old Testament canon are very different from each other. They were written about different subjects in many genres and addressed the needs of God’s people in a variety of times and circumstances. Yet, the authors of these books always drew from basic outlooks that they held in common. All Old Testament authors believed that God established a series of major covenants with his people in different periods of history. They also believed that all of these covenants were designed to fulfill one main purpose — to administer God’s kingdom so that it would spread to the ends of the earth.

This lesson will touch on four dimensions of Israel’s unifying, foundational commitment to furthering the kingdom of God. First, we’ll see how the Scriptures speak of God’s kingdom or rule in both broad and narrow senses. Second, we’ll look at the kingdom of God during the primeval history, the earliest stages of earth’s history. Third, we’ll explore the development of God’s kingdom in the history of the nation of Israel. And fourth, we’ll see how the Old Testament concept of the kingdom of God reaches its fulfillment in the New Testament age. Let’s look first at the way the Old Testament speaks of God’s reign in both broad and narrow senses.
BROAD AND NARROW

Most Christians have heard about the kingdom of God because it’s mentioned so often in the New Testament. More than 60 references to God’s kingdom appear in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke alone. In this lesson, we’ll see how this New Testament emphasis on God’s kingdom is rooted in the Old Testament. Kingdoms and empires, kings and emperors were so much a part of ancient Israelites’ experience that biblical authors felt no need to provide an explicit and succinct explanation of God’s kingdom. But this fact raises a big problem for you and me today. Because of our distance from the ancient world of the Old Testament, we must begin by summarizing the basic concept of God’s kingdom that lies just beneath the surface of every page of the Old Testament.

There are many ways to sum up how the Old Testament speaks of God’s kingdom, but we’ll look in just two directions. First, we’ll see that, in a broad sense, God’s rule is complete and unchanging. And second, in a narrow sense, God’s rule is also incomplete and developing throughout history. Let’s consider first the complete and unchanging reign of God.

UNCHANGING

In Psalm 93:1-2, we find this praise of God, the Creator:

The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty … he has put on strength as his belt. Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting (Psalm 93:1-2).

As we see here, the fact that God created and sustains everything led the psalmist to declare, “The Lord reigns.” He is the supreme king over all creation. Time and again, the Old Testament acknowledges this fundamental belief. God created and sustains all things, and he is sovereign over all. In this broader sense, his reign or kingdom is universal and unchanging.

This belief in the unavailing, universal reign of God as the Creator and Sustainer is one of the most striking differences between the faith of ancient Israelites and the religions of the nations that surrounded them. Neighboring religions commonly taught that various gods competed for sovereignty and that the power of these gods ebbed and flowed with changing circumstances. In some cases, gods were thought to rise and fall from positions of power with the annual cycles of the seasons. In other cases, gods were believed to rise and fall from positions of heavenly authority as their favored nations experienced victories and defeats in war.

But such concepts were not part of biblical faith. Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the sole Creator and Sustainer of all, the unavailing ruler over the entire creation — even over powerful spiritual creatures or so-called “gods.” Through every cycle of nature, every defeat and victory in battle, God’s kingship is universal and unchanging. And in this sense, all of creation has always been and always will be his kingdom.
So, God is king over everything. You see this in Genesis 1 in how everything in creation obeys him. Psalm 24 says “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it,” for he created it. “Who is this King of glory? [It is] the Lord!” You see, he’s king over everything. He owns it all and that never changes... If you trace the Bible from Genesis to Revelation you see God sovereign over every aspect of creation, of humanity, everything.

— Dr. Jonathan D. Worthington

God is absolutely sovereign, and that is a position that Arminians as well as Calvinists hold. That is a position that is absolutely clear in Scripture; God is completely sovereign and we follow his will at all times, and our choice does not subvert his will. Our choice is meant to be in keeping with his sovereign will.

— Dr. Grant R. Osborne

As much as Old Testament authors believed, in a broad sense, that God’s rule over creation is complete and unchanging, they also spoke of a second, narrow sense in which God’s kingdom or rule was incomplete and developing in history.

DEVELOPING

When the Scriptures speak of God’s kingdom as something that develops, they focus on how God displays or manifests his unwavering sovereignty with the passage of time. Now, most modern Christians have never lived in a kingdom where human kings have supreme unbridled authority over their nations. So, we often fail to see how prominent this theme is in the Bible. To refer to God revealing his kingship in history, Old Testament authors frequently used common depictions of divine and human kings that we don’t recognize today. For example, they spoke of God as a royal architect and builder, the royal father of his people, the lawgiver and the covenant-maker. They described God as a royal warrior, a husband and a shepherd.

Modern people often think of kings and kingdoms as very impersonal, even abhorrent political systems. But the biblical theme of God’s historical kingdom coming to earth is rich, even splendid imagery. It reveals the wonder of God as the unrivaled sovereign over all of creation and his kingdom on earth as our glorious ideal.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God issued royal decrees from his heavenly throne. He loved the people of his kingdom as a father loves his children. He called his angelic and human armies into action. He acted as king when he established and defeated nations, including his favored nation, Israel. The grand goal of these historical manifestations of God’s reign was for every creature everywhere to acknowledge that God is king. Ultimately, the entire creation will be a place of love, joy, goodness, justice, healing
and peace for God’s people from every tribe and nation. And God will fill the earth with his visible glory and receive endless praise for who he is and what he has done.

A simple way to introduce this Old Testament theme is to turn to the opening words of “The Lord’s Prayer.” In Matthew 6:9-10, Jesus summarized Old Testament outlooks on God’s developing kingdom when he taught his disciples to pray this way:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10).

When Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come,” he expressed what every Old Testament author longed to see. It’s quite common for Christians to speak of the coming of the kingdom, but all too often we don’t realize how this Christian belief is rooted in the Old Testament. So, we should take a moment to consider what Jesus meant when he taught us to pray for the coming of the kingdom.

When Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, drawing off of the whole anthology of the Psalter, he distills it down to this very basic outline of a faithful prayer. But the prayer starts with this: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” Now notice that, even for Jesus, God’s fatherhood is tied directly to his royalty. God is not merely a father, he’s a king-father. And so, as a faithful son, when you come before your father, you want his kingdom expanded. You want to see his reign brought to bear in every aspect of the human life.

— Dr. Scott Redd

Following the custom of ancient Hebrew poetry, Jesus explained what he meant when he taught us to pray for God’s kingdom to come. In the first place, Jesus spoke of God as the “Father in heaven,” a reference to God as the royal Father, the King, enthroned in heaven. And he taught us to pray for God’s name to be kept holy — “hallowed be your name.” Elaborating on this petition, he acknowledged that God’s name will be kept holy when his kingdom comes. And then, to explain what he meant by the coming of God’s kingdom, Jesus added that the kingdom or rule of God will come in its fullness when his will is done. But notice where Jesus wanted God’s will to be done: “on earth as it is in heaven.” Unlike many Christians believe today, Jesus did not teach that the goal of history is for God’s people to
spend eternity with God in heaven. Rather, Jesus taught that the goal of history is for God’s will to be done on the earth as it is already done in the throne room of heaven.

Our sure hope is that there is a day coming when God will renew all things... We can see this especially in the beautiful words that Jesus taught us, his disciples, to pray when he said, “Our Father who is in heaven, let your name be sanctified. Let your kingdom come, and let your will be done on this earth, even as it now is in heaven.” That crucial, central, foundational Christian idea is that we are now living in a time of waiting for the heavenly realities to become earthly realities, that the way things are done in heaven when God is hallowed, when all things are right, and righteousness and glory and truth and love reigns; our hope as Christians, our sure hope, is that those realities of heaven will become earthly realities. And this is what the Scriptures promise in hope as the new creation, our eternal home.

— Dr. Jonathan T. Pennington

To understand better how Jesus hoped the earth would become like heaven, consider Daniel 7:9-10. Here we find a typical Old Testament portrait of God’s heavenly throne room:

Thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him (Daniel 7:9-10).

This portrait of heaven is not unusual. Similar descriptions of God’s heavenly throne room appear in the Old and New Testaments. But there are at least two dimensions of Daniel’s vision that we should highlight.

On the one hand, God displays his visible, glorious presence before the creatures in his heavenly throne room. As the Scriptures teach, God is omnipresent — he is everywhere. He is present in all the vast galaxies of outer space, on our tiny planet, in lush forests and dry deserts, in every small village and every massive city. Yet, in his omnipresence, he largely remains invisible. Even so, as Daniel’s vision and many other Scriptures tell us, God’s presence is visible to every creature in the throne room of heaven. God sits on his throne, wearing radiant white garments, with hair white as wool. His throne is ablaze with fire, and consuming fire flows from his throne.

This portrait of heaven is one dimension of the contrast Jesus’ prayer acknowledged between heaven and earth. Yes, we see God’s glory reflected in the wonders of creation. And in biblical history, the glory of God was sometimes visible on earth. But these glimpses of God’s glory hardly compare with the overwhelming splendor of God in his heavenly throne room. So, when Jesus called for us to pray for God’s kingdom to come to earth as it is in heaven, he called for us to pray for the overwhelming brilliance of God’s visible glory to fill the earth as it already fills heaven. This is what the apostle John had in
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mind in Revelation 21:23 when he described the glory of the New Jerusalem that will descend to earth when Christ returns. Listen to John’s words:

The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb (Revelation 21:23).

When Jesus taught us to pray for the kingdom of God to come to earth as it is in heaven, he meant that we should yearn and pray for God to fill the earth with his glorious, royal splendor.

On the other hand, Daniel’s vision of heaven also associates God’s brilliant, glorious presence with the activities of the creatures who are there. As we read in Daniel 7:10:

A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him (Daniel 7:10).

Countless creatures before the throne of God in heaven attend to him, worship him, and humbly do his bidding.

Angels in heaven actually function as the priests of heaven; they serve God day and night in his temple, and they worship him day and night. They also serve as God’s messengers and God’s helpers to us here on earth — very clear throughout Scripture. But the control is absolute; it is God’s and God’s alone.

— Dr. Grant R. Osborne

God is sovereign over everything that’s happening. He’s at least allowing it, but he doesn’t endorse or approve of many of the things that are happening. But we’re going to experience a kingdom someday when people will obey the moral will of God. They will willingly do that because they will have the law written on their hearts.

— Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

This is why, in Philippians 2:10-11, the apostle Paul looked forward to the day when:

At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

In the opening lines of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus summed up the Old Testament theme of the kingdom of God as a developing, historical, earthly reality. Like all of God’s faithful prophets throughout history, the Son of God longed for the day when God’s
universal and unchanging kingship would be fully manifested on earth. On that day, God’s glory will fill the earth and every creature will obey his commands as perfectly on earth as they do in heaven. This vision of history undergirds every teaching of the Old and New Testaments.

Now that we’ve distinguished how the Scriptures speak of the kingdom of God in both broad and narrow senses, we’re in a position to explore how the Bible portrays the historical development of God’s kingdom on earth. We’ll start with the period of time often called the “primeval history,” that covers the events described in Genesis 1:1–11:9.

**PRIMEVAL HISTORY**

When modern evangelicals read the primeval history of Genesis, we’re often preoccupied with what it says about the age of the earth, the origin of human life and other contemporary scientific issues. These topics are important, but they easily draw our attention away from how these chapters first introduced ancient Israelites to the earliest stages of how the kingdom of God developed on earth. As we’re about to see, the primeval history emphasized how God acted as king at this time — how he exerted his royal authority to create, to arrange and to populate the visible world so that it would become the place where he would extend his sovereign rule from heaven.

The primeval history covers the history that we see from Genesis 1–11; it’s pre-Abrahamic history. So, it covers the origin of the world like what we find in Genesis 1. It also covers even the creation of mankind, how mankind came into being in this world. It covers the Sabbath as well as marriage, the institution of marriage, and God’s dealings with his people before Abraham, so how God dealt with Noah and the flood.

— Dr. Daniel Simango

We’ll explore how the primeval history introduces the developing kingdom or rule of God in earth’s history by touching on three issues: first, how this part of the Bible describes the earth as the place of God’s kingdom; second, how it identifies the people for God’s kingdom purposes; and third, how it depicts the early progress of God’s kingdom during this period. Let’s look first at earth as the place of God’s kingdom.

**PLACE**

The opening chapters of Genesis reveal that the earth was made to be the place of God’s royal rule in many ways, but we’ll focus on just two. First, we’ll see how God’s initial preparations of creation reflected his royal purposes for the earth. And second, we’ll see how God set the stage for the ongoing expansion of his kingdom on earth. Let’s begin by looking at God’s initial preparations in his magnificent royal design of creation.
Initial Preparations

To grasp what the primeval history has to say about God's initial preparations for his kingdom on earth, we have to set aside, for the moment, many of our modern questions. We first need to ask how ancient Israelites understood the story of Genesis in 1:1–2:3. It helps to know that throughout the ancient world, both divine and human kings were often honored as great architects and builders. Along these lines, a number of interpreters have shown that the creation story presents God as the true divine royal architect and builder who designed creation to be his massive royal palace. Every time the creation account refers to God saying, “Let [this or that happen],” it depicts God as directing the construction of creation through royal edicts from his heavenly throne. In a similar way, parallel accounts in other ancient literature indicate that God’s rest on the Sabbath Day portrayed God as resting on his throne to receive honor for having successfully exerted his royal authority and power over creation. In these and other ways, the opening of the book of Genesis taught ancient Israel how their God, the divine architect and builder, first extended his royal power from heaven into the visible world.

The creation story begins with these familiar words in Genesis 1:1:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

These opening words establish the fact that God created two realms or levels — heaven above and the visible earth below. In Genesis 1:2–2:3 God began to construct the earth into a place for his glorious reign to extend from heaven to earth. We can divide this part of Genesis into three sections, starting with the initial chaos of the world. Listen to the way 1:2 describes the earth:

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2).

As we see here, at first the earth, or the creation below heaven, was “without form and void,” covered with darkness and the deep.

At this point, the earth stood in sharp contrast with God’s glorious heavenly throne room. As we’ve just seen, throughout the Scriptures heaven is filled with the blinding glory of God, but the earth was not at this time. The Hebrew terms translated here “without form” and “void” are used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to wild and desert places on the earth, places that are largely uninhabitable by human beings. And the terms “darkness” and “the deep,” have very negative connotations throughout the Scriptures.

But Genesis 1:2 tells us another essential fact about the opening of earth’s history. It says, “The Spirit of God was hovering over … the waters.” The God of light and life was not satisfied to leave the earth in its initial chaotic condition. His Spirit began to move on the dark, lifeless world.
The second major section of the creation account in Genesis 1, is the six days of God’s ordering of the world into a palatial edifice in verses 3-31. These six days exhibit a discernable pattern that displays God’s unsurpassed architectural wisdom and power.

In the first three days, God dealt with the fact that the world was formless. In the second three days, he dealt with the fact that the world was void or empty. God’s actions in these two sets of days parallel each other in remarkable ways.

The six days of creation

In day one God formed the day and restricted the darkness to the night. And correspondingly, in day four he placed the sun, moon and stars in the sky to maintain this order. In day two God formed the atmosphere, separating the waters below from the waters above. Then in day five, God filled the space between the waters with birds, and filled the waters below with sea creatures. On the third day God restrained the waters below by forming lush, fertile land. And on the sixth day, God placed land animals and humanity on the dry land. God displayed incomparable royal wisdom and power as he arranged and populated the world.

The third and closing section of the creation story depicts the Sabbath day in 2:1-3. As in the previous verses, this account also highlights God as the royal architect and builder of creation.
We read in Genesis 2:3:

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation (Genesis 2:3).

Here, the picture is that God sat back on his throne in heaven, delighted in his accomplishments, and received honor for what he had done. His work was so magnificent that later, in the Ten Commandments, God commanded Israel to commemorate his accomplishments every Sabbath day.

In effect, Genesis 1:1–2:3 tells us that for six days God issued royal decrees from his heavenly throne that turned the world from darkness and chaos into a magnificent royal edifice. And in the end, God received honor for what he had done as the royal architect and builder of creation.

We’ve considered how God made initial preparations for the place of his kingdom purposes in the opening of Genesis. Now we should turn to a special feature of this royal design that is often overlooked. God also revealed that he had ordained the ongoing expansion of his royal rule to the ends of the earth.

**Ongoing Expansion**

Genesis 1:3–30 tells us six times that when God looked at his creation, he saw that it was “good.” And in verse 31, on the sixth day, he looked at his work and saw that all he had made was “very good.” The word translated “good” — תּוֹב (tov) in Hebrew — means, here and in other places in the Old Testament, “pleasant,” “pleasing,” and even “beautiful.” When the Bible says that creation was good, it means that God approved of his work. But as we’re about to see, what God had done was only the beginning of something much greater that was to occur on the earth.

All too often, well-meaning Christians mistakenly believe that when God said his creation was “very good,” he meant that there was nothing left to be done or nothing to be improved. But this was not the case at all. After all, in Genesis 2:18 God also said “It is not good that the man should be alone.” The darkness, the chaos and the deep that once engulfed the world had only been restricted; they had not been eliminated. God began by placing humanity in his sacred, royal garden. But God also called Adam in Genesis 1:28 to fill, to subdue, and to have dominion over the entire earth. Creation was “very good” at the end of the first primeval week, but only in the sense that everything was ready — ready to fulfill God’s larger kingdom purposes for his creation.

As we read in Genesis 2:8-9:

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east … And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:8-9).

Think about it this way: In the opening chapters of Genesis, God shaped the world in the ways artists often make pencil sketches on their canvases prior to painting a full
landscape. God established the basic order necessary for the world to become what he planned for it to be one day, but he didn’t immediately paint the entire canvas of the world.

Instead, in his inscrutable wisdom, God painted just one portion of the earth with magnificent colors. He adorned it as the centerpiece of the earth. This region of the earth was called Eden. Within Eden was a garden—a wondrously beautiful place, a magnificent sacred paradise fit for the special presence of the King of heaven. It was so holy, so set apart from the rest of creation, that God walked there and displayed his visible glory. But as magnificent as the garden was, God’s goal for history was not that the earth would stay in this condition. Rather, the entire earth was to become like the holy Garden of Eden so that one day, his visible glory would fill the entire creation. The condition of the earth at the end of the first week was just the starting point for all that the Old Testament teaches about the developing, historical kingdom of God.

So, our creation cultural mandate is to be stewards, is to be God’s creatures in relationship to him, to expand the borders of that garden sanctuary, to do so in worship, devotion, obedience, exploring all the resources of his creation, and that, of course, will be picked up ultimately in the new heavens and the new earth as well.

— Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

So far, we’ve seen that the primeval period began with God preparing the world to be the place of his developing, historical kingdom. Now, we should turn to a second crucial facet of the biblical record: the role God ordained for people at this stage of world history.

**PEOPLE**

Have you ever noticed how much the Scriptures refer to human beings? It’s nearly impossible to find a single page of the Bible that doesn’t refer in one way or another to people. And at first, this may seem strange because we usually think of the Bible as the revelation of who God is and what he has done. And this is certainly true. But the drama of biblical history also stresses the special, crucial role that human beings play in God’s plan for creation. Of course, human beings can do nothing good apart from the benevolence of God. And for this reason, in an ultimate sense, all glory belongs to God alone. Yet, the Scriptures make it clear that God determined to fulfill his kingdom purposes primarily through the human race. This is why the Scriptures have so much to say about people. They explain why the New Testament stresses the humanity of Jesus, the only perfect, righteous human being who fulfills the purposes for which human beings were first created.

This special role for humanity becomes clear in Genesis 2:18 where God said this about Adam in the Garden of Eden:

The Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18).
Earlier, in Genesis 1, God concluded that the creation was “very good.” But he also found something in his royal garden that was “not good” — Adam had no wife. But why was this not good? It was because God had created humanity for a purpose that was too great for one man to accomplish on his own. Many people were required to accomplish humanity’s role in the development of God’s kingdom on earth.

This critical role for people is described in two ways. God made Adam and Eve to serve as his priests and as his vice-regents or royal representatives. These roles are interconnected in the Scriptures, but we’ll look at them separately, starting with the service of human beings as God’s priests.

**Priests**

On the one side, Adam — and later Eve along with him — was given the task of serving as God’s priest. He was called to honor God with acts of worship. We noted earlier that, in Daniel’s vision, countless creatures minister before the Lord in his heavenly court. And this is what Adam and Eve were called to do on earth. We can see this priestly role for humanity in Genesis 2:15 where we read these words:

> The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15, NIV).

At first glance, we might think that this passage simply notes that God called Adam to be a gardener. But his task was much more than this because the Garden of Eden was a sacred, royal garden for God. The expression “to work it and take care of it” is unusual and had a special significance for Moses and ancient Israel. In a number of places, similar expressions in the Pentateuch are used to describe the work of priests and Levites before the glory of God in the Tabernacle. For example, in Numbers 3:8 we read:

> They are to take care of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle (Numbers 3:8, NIV).

The description of Adam and Eve’s role in the garden reflects this description of the Levites’ role in their priestly service to God. Adam and Eve were placed in God’s holy, royal garden, the place of the divine King’s glory on earth. There they served God much like priests and Levites served later in the Tabernacle where the glory of God appeared.
before Israel. Adam and Eve were called to perform all of their work as sacred priestly service — as acts designed to honor the great divine King in worship.

On the other side, the first people who lived on earth were not only to serve as God’s priests. God also called for them to serve as his vice-regents, his royal representatives. In effect, Adam and Eve were God’s royal priests.

Vice-Regents

We find this description of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:26 where we read these words:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26).

Everyone familiar with the Scriptures knows that this and many other passages in the Old and New Testaments call human beings the “image” or “likeness” of God. In the past, most theologians thought this simply meant that human beings are rational, moral and religious creatures. But, as true as these traditional Christian outlooks are, this isn’t the focus of Genesis 1.

To understand the significance of God calling human beings his image and likeness, it helps to know a common practice in the ancient world. Outside of Israel, pharaohs, kings
and emperors were often called “images,” “likenesses” and even “sons” of their gods. They were thought to be the living images that represented their gods’ interests on earth. As heaven’s representatives, kings had the special task in ancient societies of learning the will of their gods in heaven, and then using their royal authority to accomplish this will on earth. It’s no wonder then that Jesus called on his followers to pray for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. This was his royal task.

In Acts 7:22, Stephen recalled that Moses learned the ways of the courts of Egypt. Moses knew all too well that the Pharaohs of Egypt and the kings of other nations were often called “images,” “likenesses” or “sons” of their gods to set them apart from ordinary human beings. But under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses opposed this widespread false belief. In the beginning, the true God of Israel had actually declared that all human beings — not just a handful of kings and emperors — were the images of God, the true royal priests of God. This must have been a difficult lesson for ancient Israelites to believe. It required these former slaves to transform how they viewed themselves and their role in the world. God had ordained every Israelite, along with every other human being, to serve as his royal, priestly representatives.

And in our day, modern secular cultures often teach us that human beings are little more than the result of random historical circumstances. But the biblical account requires us to conform our view of ourselves and our view of other people according to what God first said about us. We are all created as God’s priestly, royal images, called to ensure that God’s will is accomplished on the earth as it is in heaven.

In Genesis 1:27-28 we find that God elaborated on the service of humanity as he uttered words of blessing from his heavenly throne:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:27-28).

From the beginning God called every human being to be his priestly, royal image, and to fulfill what theologians often call “the cultural mandate.”

As we’ve seen, God established a measure of order and beauty in creation, and he put humanity in his wondrous, holy garden to serve him as royal priests. The great King of heaven ordained humanity as the instrument for his kingdom’s expansion. Human beings were to multiply, to spread out, and to make the entire earth like God’s garden in order that they might bring the will of God to the earth and serve him throughout the world. Extending God’s kingdom throughout the world was the very purpose for which God put human beings on the earth.

Now, I think we have to admit that as modern people we seldom think of the purpose of our existence in these ways. When someone asks you, “What do you do?” how often have you responded, “Well, I’m fruitful. I multiply. I fill the earth, I subdue it and have dominion on behalf of God”? These concepts are so foreign to many followers of Christ that we seldom think of describing what we do with our lives in these ways. So, don’t be surprised if you find yourself confused about the purpose of your life. We need to find our purpose in life by taking to heart what God first said about human beings. We
were made to be God’s royal priests. We were created to ensure that the rule of God is spread to the ends of the earth so that one day the entire creation will be filled with God’s visible glory to his endless praise.

We’ve seen that in the primeval history God established earth as the place of his kingdom, and people as the servants of his kingdom. Now we should briefly sketch the progress of God’s developing, earthly kingdom during this time.

**Progress**

If Adam and Eve had not fallen into sin, the path of humanity’s service as the image of God would have been a rather straightforward matter. Adam and Eve would have had children, their offspring would have had children of their own, and so on. And together these large numbers of God’s priestly, royal images would have filled the earth, subdued it and had dominion according to the commands of God. But as we know all too well, things did not go in this direction. Sin quickly turned humanity’s straight path into a long, twisting road of trouble. Yet, despite these troubles early in the primeval history, God assured the humanity that his purpose for them would not fail.

There’s much that could be said about the progress of God’s kingdom during the primeval period, but we’ll summarize it in three steps. In the first place, we’ll speak of the cosmic treason that took place. Second, we’ll look at how the corruption of humanity increased and led to severe divine judgment. But third, we’ll find that God established a long-term strategy that would enable humanity to fulfill his kingdom purposes. Let’s look first at the cosmic treason that took place against the divine King.

**Cosmic Treason**

Instead of faithfully fulfilling what their divine King had commanded, Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan’s temptation and rebelled by eating the forbidden fruit. So, instead of spreading the Garden of Eden to the ends of the earth, they were cast out of the Garden to live under a curse. Still, humanity’s responsibilities as kingdom builders didn’t end. Adam and Eve and their descendants were still to multiply and to have dominion over the earth in God’s service. Yet, God cursed humanity and the earth so that multiplication and dominion became painful, difficult and frustrating. Regarding multiplication, in Genesis 3:16 God said these words to Eve:

> I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children (Genesis 3:16).

Regarding dominion, in verse 17 God warned Adam in this way:

> Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life (Genesis 3:17).
Sadly, the priestly, royal images of God were forced to dwell in a hostile world and experience pain and futility in the mission on which God had set them.

The record of the progress of God’s kingdom during the primeval period began with Adam and Eve’s cosmic treason. But their descendants pursued a path of corruption that eventually led to severe judgment from God.

**Corruption and Judgment**

According to the book of Genesis, when Adam and Eve fell into sin, it was no longer true that all of their descendants would be faithful to God. In fact, none of them could serve as God’s faithful images apart from God’s redeeming mercy. Much of the human race continued to rebel against God. Adam and Eve’s first son, Cain, murdered his brother, Abel. And Cain’s genealogy in Genesis 4 tells us that, as Cain’s family grew, their rebellion worsened. Instead of serving as God’s royal priests, Cain’s descendants exalted themselves in resistance to God’s reign and filled the earth with violence against other human beings. And as time went on, the violence of humanity caused God to cleanse the earth with a worldwide flood.

As we read in Genesis 6:5-7:

> The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the earth;”
the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them” (Genesis 6:5-7).

The record of the progress of God’s kingdom during the primeval history not only includes humanity’s cosmic treason and their corruption and subsequent judgment. It also reveals that God established a long-term strategy that would eventually result in the spread of his kingdom throughout the world. In effect, God determined to redeem a people for himself over time and to build his kingdom through them.

**Long-Term Strategy**

The first hint of this long-term strategy was introduced in Genesis 3:15. Here, God cursed the serpent who had instigated Adam and Eve’s sin with these words:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Genesis 3:15, NIV).

In this passage, God announced to the serpent that the human race will be divided into two parties: Satan’s offspring, or “seed” as it is often translated — those human beings who align themselves with Satan’s rebellious ways — and Eve’s offspring, those human beings who seek to serve God faithfully. These two groups of people will be at enmity with each other throughout history. God also promised that one day Eve’s seed — redeemed humanity — will crush the head of the serpent, conquering the one who had led them into cosmic treason. This promise is ultimately fulfilled by Christ. Listen to the way Paul assured Christ’s followers in Romans 16:20:

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet (Romans 16:20).

The hope of victory over evil for redeemed, faithful images of God extends throughout history and reaches its fulfillment in Christ, the perfect image of God.

Because of God’s long-term strategy for his kingdom, a third son, Seth, was born to replace faithful Abel. As the genealogy of Genesis 5 tells us, Seth and his descendants honored God and sought to extend his kingdom throughout the earth. And even when human violence so filled the world that God destroyed most of humanity, one descendant of Seth — Noah — was faithful to God and found favor in God’s eyes. After the great flood of Noah’s day, God reaffirmed his long-term strategy for the fulfillment of humanity’s service to his kingdom.

In Genesis 8:21-22, we read these words:

I will never again curse the ground because of man, [even though] the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease (Genesis 8:21-22).
Notice how God recognized that all human beings are prone to evil, even from their youth. He acknowledged that sin would continue to wreak havoc on his fallen image. So, under the sign of the rainbow, God announced that he would stabilize the natural order of “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night”, as long as the earth remains. But why did God establish this secure order for nature after the flood? His reason becomes clear in the words that immediately follow in Genesis 9:1:

God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1).

As this verse tells us, God renewed his call for human beings to serve his kingdom purposes. He established the stability of nature so that the image of God could fulfill its original service to his kingdom.

When God created humanity — we go back to Genesis 1 — and God created us in his image, male and female in his image, and said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” And it’s not just before sin enters in … but even after he destroys the earth with the flood, and Noah and his wife and the sons and their wives, they all get out of the ark, and he once again says, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” God’s given us this earth for our good and for his glory.

— Dr. Rick Boyd

From this point forward, the Scriptures reveal how the path of humanity’s service to God’s kingdom was not straightforward or uninterrupted. God’s people faced strong opposition. They failed and suffered many setbacks. Yet, God established long-term stability in nature so that one day the image of God would fulfill the task of spreading his kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Now that we’ve seen what the Scriptures teach about the kingdom of God during the primeval history, we’re ready to move to the next major stage of kingdom history in the Old Testament, the period in which God dealt especially with the nation of Israel as the chosen people of his kingdom.

**NATION OF ISRAEL**

It’s difficult to miss the fact that the nation of Israel plays a central role in biblical history. But why? The Scriptures focus on the people of Israel because God chose them to lead the entire human race in the service he had ordained for his images from the beginning. The Israelites were the seed of the woman, the royal priesthood, his treasured possession, his firstborn among the nations. And as such, they were to grow in number and have dominion over the earth in service to God’s kingdom. Now the Israelites repeatedly failed to be faithful to God, and God brought severe judgment against them, but God never
cancelled this role for Israel. As we’re about to see, throughout the Scriptures, God remained committed to Israel leading all the nations into his service.

To see how the kingdom of God unfolded throughout the history of the nation of Israel, we’ll look again at three topics. First, we’ll explore the place or location of the kingdom. Second, we’ll look at the people of the kingdom in the nation of Israel. And third, we’ll sketch the progress of the kingdom in Israel. Let’s look first at the place of God’s kingdom.

**PLACE**

When God first put Adam and Eve on earth, he planted them in a special place — in the Garden of Eden. But he also commissioned them to serve as his images by establishing his will throughout the whole world. Now as we’re about to see, when God chose Abraham and his descendants, he called for them to orient themselves toward the vicinity of Eden once again and from there to fulfill humanity’s original commission.

Listen to the way Genesis 12:1-3 describes when God first called Abraham, the father of Israel, to be his special servant. God said:

> Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3).

Notice the geographical focus of this passage. God called Abraham to leave his father’s homeland in Mesopotamia and to migrate to a land Abraham had not yet seen.

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God led Abraham from Ur in Mesopotamia to Haran. And later, God called Abraham from Haran to the land of Canaan, the land that we often call the “Promised Land.” When Abraham arrived in Canaan, God confirmed that his descendants would take possession of that place as their enduring homeland. And from that time forward, the Promised Land became the staging ground for Israel’s kingdom service.

Abraham’s call to the Promised Land helps us understand the place of God’s kingdom in the history of Israel in at least two ways. First, God called Abraham and his descendants to serve him at the original geographical center of his kingdom. Second, God called Israel to carry out the geographical expansion of his kingdom beyond the borders of the Promised Land. Let’s look at the idea that God called Abraham and his descendants to serve him at the original center of his kingdom on earth.

Original Center

A few moments ago, we saw that the original centerpiece of God’s earthly kingdom was the land of Eden and the sacred garden within it. Unfortunately, many biblical interpreters have mistakenly assumed that Eden was somewhere in lower Mesopotamia, near the Persian Gulf. We don’t know for certain how much territory was considered the land of Eden. It could have extended throughout what we now call the Fertile Crescent. But the book of Genesis itself closely associates the land and Garden of Eden with the land that God promised to Abraham.

This geographical orientation becomes clear in Genesis 2:10-14 where God described the boundaries of Eden:

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah … The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris … And the fourth river is the Euphrates (Genesis 2:10-14).

Notice here that four primeval rivers are associated with Eden. The first two are the Pishon and the Gihon. Scholars still debate where these rivers were located. But here, they’re associated with the land of Havilah and Cush to the southwest of the Promised Land. The second two, the Tigris and the Euphrates, stream eastward from the mountainous regions of modern Syria. Understanding
this much about the locations of the rivers of Eden is important because, broadly speaking, these locations correlate with rivers that were also associated later in the book of Genesis with the land God promised to Abraham. Listen to Genesis 15:18 and the way God described the land he promised to Abraham and his descendants:

To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates (Genesis 15:18).

As we see here, rivers marked the boundaries of Israel’s Promised Land — the river of Egypt and the river Euphrates.

Most interpreters rightly agree that the “river of Egypt” was not the Nile, but was one of a number of rivers or wadis in northeastern Egypt. Beyond this, the river Euphrates, the upper Euphrates in modern western Syria, marked the northeastern boundary of the Promised Land. Later in biblical history, these rivers marked the extent of Israel’s lands during the reigns of David and Solomon.

As we can see, the Promised Land’s geographical boundaries roughly parallel the boundaries of the land of Eden. So, as other biblical passages indicate, when God called Abraham to Canaan, he called him back to the original centerpiece of earth’s geography, to Eden, where Adam and Eve first began to serve God’s kingdom.

The place of Eden not only helps us understand that God first called Abraham, and later brought Moses, to the original geographical center of God’s kingdom. It also indicates that Israel’s Promised Land was the starting point for the geographical expansion of God’s reign through Israel to the ends of the earth.

**Expansion**

According to God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, possessing the Promised Land was for a much greater purpose. As God said:

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

In this passage, God directly drew Abraham’s attention to the impact he and his descendants would have on all nations. God promised to bless and curse other nations in response to their reaction to Abraham. But notice the final result of this twofold process. God promised that Abraham and his descendants would bring God’s blessings to all the families of the earth. This is why, in Romans 4:13, the apostle Paul summarized God’s promise to Abraham and his seed in this way:

Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world (Romans 4:13, NIV).

Adam and Eve were called to fill the entire earth and to have dominion over it, but sin had divided the human race between those who served God and those who did not. But God chose Abraham and Israel to bring his blessings to all nations on earth who would
receive him. And as followers of Christ, we know that this promise is fulfilled through Jesus, the perfect son of Abraham.

The people of Israel were well aware that they were destined to serve God’s purposes by possessing more than the Promised Land. In the days of Moses, two and a half tribes received permission to occupy lands east of the Jordan. And David, Solomon and other kings in David’s dynasty extended Israel’s borders to the north, to the east and to the south. Even when Israel was sent into exile, the prophets reassured God’s people that, not only would they return to the Promised Land, but the Messiah would one day lead them in spreading God’s kingdom to the ends of the earth.

With the place of God’s kingdom in the days of Old Testament Israel in mind, we’re ready to turn to the people of the kingdom during this time.

PEOPLE

We saw earlier that God honored human beings by creating them as his royal priestly images. And passages like Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9 indicate that all human beings still have the honor and the responsibility of serving God’s kingdom purposes as his images. Still, in his inscrutable wisdom, God ordained that the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel, would have a special role of leading the way in the spread of God’s rule throughout the world. The history of Israel is complex, but it will help to summarize how God ensured that the people of Israel would carry out this kingdom mission.

We’ll look at three matters related to the people of God’s kingdom in the history of Israel: first, the selection of Israel as a special people; second, the formation of the people of Israel into a kingdom of priests; and third, God’s designation of official priests and kings to lead Israel. Consider first the selection of Israel as the special people of God.

Selection of Israel

As we saw earlier, after the sin of Adam and Eve, the human race divided between the seed of the serpent — those who served the purposes of Satan; and the seed of the woman — those who served the purposes of God. According to Genesis 5, Adam’s third son, Seth, became the father of a faithful line of humanity that led to righteous Noah and his sons and daughters-in-law. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. But of these three, Shem and his descendants were special in the eyes of God. All of this genealogical information in the book of Genesis was designed to explain the background of God’s selection of Israel as his chosen people.

From the line of Shem, God chose one man to serve as the seed of the woman — Israel’s patriarch, Abraham. The patriarchal history of Genesis reveals that Abraham had a miraculous son, Isaac, who continued this chosen line. Then Isaac’s son Jacob, also known as Israel, became God’s specially honored image. And finally, Jacob had twelve sons, Joseph and his brothers, and these twelve sons were the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Out of all the nations of humanity, the tribes of Israel were God’s special people, the people of his kingdom.
In the days of Moses, God’s selection of the tribes of Israel as his special people moved forward. God brought the tribes of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and formed them into a nation, a kingdom of priests to fulfill his goal of spreading his kingdom throughout the world.

**Kingdom of Priests**

In Exodus 19:4-6, God declared this purpose for Israel in no uncertain terms. At Mount Sinai, he made the following declaration:

> You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:4-6).

Here we see that Israel was to be a “holy nation” — that is, special, separated, distinguished as God’s treasured possession from all other peoples. As his holy people, God called the entire nation of Israel a “kingdom of priests” or, as it may be translated, a “royal priesthood.”

Exodus 19:6 and particularly the phrase “kingdom of priests” serves as a kind of echo of the original calling of humankind, male and female, in Genesis 1. I think they are called to be king, to have a kingly role over creation, to rule over creation… Also, in the immediate context, right after the phrase “kingdom of priests” is the phrase “a holy nation.” Israel is to be a holy nation; priests are to be holy and reflect God’s holiness, and Israel is to reflect God’s holiness too by consecrating themselves through the various laws that make up the Torah.

— Dr. Douglas Gropp

This designation of Israel shows that Israel was called to further the role that Adam and Eve had as the image of God in the very beginning. The development of the tribes of Israel into a kingdom of priests enabled them to move the kingdom of God on earth forward.

Although God’s selection of Israel gave his people the privileges and responsibilities of becoming a kingdom of priests, we should also note that God called some Israelites to lead in the specialized offices of priests and kings.

**Priests and Kings**

Aaron and his descendants became the official priests of Israel to lead the nation into the special presence of God in the tabernacle, and later at the temple. They led the
worship, sacrifice, prayers and praise of Israel. They also instructed Israel in the law of God. And after the time of Saul, God ordained David and his descendants to serve as kings over Israel. The dynasty of David was ordained not only to supervise the true worship of God, but also to enforce obedience to God in Israel and in other nations on earth. From this time forward, David’s house was to lead the worldwide expansion of God’s kingdom. And of course, this is why the New Testament emphasizes so much that Jesus, the son of David, is the great high priest and king over God’s people today. He alone fulfills all that these offices were designed to accomplish.

With the place and people of the kingdom in the nation of Israel in mind, we should also mention the progress of the kingdom that took place through the nation of Israel.

**PROGRESS**

The story of Israel in the Old Testament includes both positive accomplishments and abysmal failures. Nearly every generation of Israel rebelled against God in one way or another and suffered under God’s temporary judgments. But time and again, God brought Israel to repentance and renewed them. Still, toward the end of the Old Testament, Israel’s sins became so great that God brought a great curse of exile from the Promised Land. For hundreds of years, Israel had no homeland, no priesthood and temple, no son of David to lead them in spreading God’s kingdom. Yet, despite these terrible conditions, God’s prophets reassured Israel that one day a great son of David would rise and lead Israel in spreading God’s kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Time will only allow us to highlight three crucial steps in the progress of God’s kingdom in Old Testament Israel: the time of promise; the events of the exodus and conquest; and the time when Israel became a full-fledged empire.

Let’s look first at what took place during the period of God’s promise.
Promise

When we speak of the period of promise, we have in mind the generations of Israel’s patriarchs. During the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jacob’s sons, God made many promises about the future of the nation. These promises divide into two basic categories that correspond to the original goals God set before his image in the Garden of Eden: promises of Israel’s multiplication and promises of Israel’s dominion.

In the first place, much like God called Adam and Eve to fill the earth with their descendants, God promised Israel’s patriarchs that their descendants would one day multiply beyond number. Listen to God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:5:

“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5).

Here God promised that Abraham and his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. This is why the book of Genesis stresses the birth of Isaac, Abraham’s miracle child through Sarah. It’s also why the biblical story focuses so much on Isaac’s son Jacob and on Jacob’s twelve sons. Israel’s numerical increase is a central theme in the period of Israel’s patriarchs because God ordained Israel to fulfill the original commission he gave to Adam and Eve.

In the second place, the biblical stories about the patriarchs also focus on Israel’s dominion over the earth. Much like God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God promised that Abraham’s descendants would possess the land of Canaan. As God said to Abraham in Genesis 15:7:

I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess (Genesis 15:7).

This is why the Scriptures reveal that Abraham purchased a symbolic piece of land in Canaan as a burial site for his family. It also explains why God commanded Jacob to return to his homeland, even as he faced great danger from his brother Esau.

The book of Genesis closes with Joseph assuring his brothers that they would leave Egypt and return to the Promised Land. The patriarchal period was a time when God promised that he would multiply Israel into a great nation and give dominion over the Promised Land to Israel.

After the period of promise for Israel’s patriarchs, the progress of God’s kingdom continued in the time of the exodus and conquest.

Exodus and Conquest

You’ll recall that when Moses and the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, they sang a song of praise to God that appears in Exodus 15:1-18. This passage highlights the fact that God redeemed Israel from Egypt in order to further Adam and Eve’s original mission by expanding his kingdom on the earth.
In Exodus 15:13 we read these words:

You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed;
you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode (Exodus 15:13).

Notice that the Israelites praised God because he was guiding them toward his “holy abode” or dwelling.

As we’ve seen, just like Eden, the Promised Land was to be the center of God’s special holy presence on the earth. But more than this, we should note that the term in Exodus 15:13 translated “guided” — nahal (נָהַל) in Hebrew — is associated in a number of Scriptures with shepherds leading sheep. Shepherding imagery like this was often used to describe the activities of kings, both in the ancient Near East in general, and in the Bible. God guided his people toward his holy dwelling as their shepherding king. It’s not surprising then that the theme of God’s kingship and kingdom appears explicitly in Exodus 15:17-18. At the end of the song at the Red Sea we read:

You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The Lord will reign forever and ever (Exodus 15:17-18).

According to these verses, God took Israel toward his holy mountain, a sanctuary that was later revealed to be Jerusalem. And that mountain sanctuary would be God’s “abode” — yashav (יָשַׁב) in Hebrew — a term that often connotes a king’s enthronement. In light of the other royal motifs in this passage, it’s best to understand that this sanctuary will be the place of God’s royal enthronement. This is why verse 18 immediately praises God with explicit royal terminology, saying that, from there, “The Lord will reign forever and ever.”

Israel has experienced God’s deliverance and sings this song of victory at the Red Sea: “The Lord will reign forever and ever.” But this is a different kind of king... And unlike kings who live far away, who you may only encounter through their face on a coin — or in the modern world, their picture on TV or in the newspapers — Israel’s God, the Lord, the true King, invites God’s people to come and be with him on his holy mountain, Sinai, and then even more profoundly makes a means, the tabernacle, where God can literally come down and abide in the midst of his people forever.

— Dr. Brian D. Russell

When God acted as Israel’s king by leading the nation like a shepherd to the Promised Land, he did this to establish them around his royal throne on earth. The purpose of the exodus and conquest of the Promised Land was to re-establish God’s reign, his kingship, and his kingdom on earth.
Having touched on the progress of God’s kingdom in the periods of promise and exodus and conquest, we should look at a third stage of Israel’s history as a nation: the stage of the empire. Under David and Solomon’s leadership, Israel became a bona fide kingdom with a human king who led the people of God in worship and in obedience to God’s commands.

Empire

Unfortunately, on the basis of 1 Samuel 8, many evangelical interpreters have mistakenly believed that God never planned for Israel to have a human king. But from the days of the patriarchs, God revealed that, at the right time, Israel was to have a human king to further the kingdom of God. God determined that this human king would be a descendant of David. He would lead the nation of Israel, and eventually every nation on earth. And he would lead them in fulfillment of humanity’s original purpose — to spread God’s kingdom to the ends of the earth. And of course, as every Christian knows, Jesus is the perfectly righteous king from the line of David who will bring the kingdom of God to earth as it is in heaven.

Sadly, Israel’s kings failed to fulfill this calling from God. In fact, 1 and 2 Kings makes it clear that many of Israel’s kings, even from the house of David, led the people of Israel into rebellion against God. And these rebellions eventually led to the great troubles of the exile. Still, by God’s grace, the reigns of David and his son Solomon represented a significant forward movement of God’s kingdom on earth. Despite their failures, they secured and expanded the territories of God’s kingdom. And with the establishment of David’s throne in Jerusalem, God put into place the permanent dynasty that would represent his rule on the earth and lead many in the true worship of God. Listen to the way 1 Chronicles 29:23 describes the throne of David and Solomon:

Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king in place of David his father (1 Chronicles 29:23).

As we see here, the throne of David was no ordinary throne. It was “the throne of the Lord.” Much like Adam and Eve were originally called to serve as God’s vice-regents, the royal house of David represented the royal authority of God himself.

Beyond this, the house of David was also a royal priesthood. David and Solomon arranged and supervised the services of priests and Levites who led the people of Israel in the worship of God. And David prepared for Solomon to build a temple for God in Jerusalem. Solomon placed the ark of the covenant that David had brought to Jerusalem in the temple. And according to David, this ark of the covenant was God’s footstool on earth. As David declared in 1 Chronicles 28:2:

I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God, and I made preparations for building (1 Chronicles 28:2).
As Isaiah 66:1 tells us, God’s throne was in heaven, but the footstool of his throne, where his feet touched the earth, was the ark of the covenant in the temple. The visible glory of God filled the temple, much like God had appeared to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Jerusalem’s temple became the centerpiece of God’s kingship on earth.

So, we see that by the time of David and Solomon, Israel had developed from a migrating tribe in the days of Abraham, to a nation established through exodus and conquest, to an empire with a king and a temple in the city of Jerusalem. But what was God’s purpose in bringing Israel to this point? What was the grand goal of Israel’s empire? In Psalm 72:1-17, the psalmist described the glorious destiny of Israel under the rule of David’s house in this way:

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son! … May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! … May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him! … May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed! (Psalm 72:1-17).

In this passage the psalmist prayed for “the king” and the “royal son.” He prayed that David’s dynasty would be characterized by “justice” and “righteousness.” But he also prayed for the expansion of David’s reign to the whole earth — that he would reign “from sea to sea,” from “the River to the ends of the earth.” He prayed that “all kings” would bow before the king of Israel and serve him. He prayed that the king’s “name” would “endure forever” and that “his fame” would “continue as long as the sun.” No wonder then that, in verse 17, the psalmist wrote these words about David’s dynasty: “May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!”

The allusion to God’s promise in Genesis 12:3 — that Abraham would be a blessing to all the families of the earth — is obvious. God’s purpose for choosing Abraham and his descendants would finally be fulfilled when the house of David spread God’s blessing to all nations. Then the faithful will receive justice, and prosperity and peace will abound throughout the earth. With this image of the future in mind, the psalmist closed in verse 19 with this resounding praise to God:

Blessed be [God’s] glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen! (Psalm 72:19).

Psalm 72:19 reveals the ultimate goal for all of the developments that took place in Israel, from the patriarchs’ promises, through the exodus and conquest, and to the empire. These stages of the kingdom were all intended to fill the entire earth with God’s glory. As God’s kingdom spread from the borders of Israel to the ends of the earth through the reign of David’s house, God’s glorious presence would fill the whole world just as it fills heaven.

One day the whole earth will be filled with God’s radiance. It will fill it in every nook and cranny so that, according to the symbolic imagery of the book of Revelation, there won’t even need to be a sun because God’s glory will light, it will radiate throughout all of the cosmos. We see that...
plan introduced in Genesis 1 where God creates man and woman in his image, and then he goes and tells them to fill the earth and subdue it, showing us that even all the way back in Genesis 1, God’s plan was not merely to fill the Garden but to fill the whole earth with his image, a worshiping image, reflecting back to him his glory.

— Dr. Scott Redd

So far, we’ve seen how the Old Testament speaks of the kingdom of God in both broad and narrow senses, and how God’s kingdom developed during the primeval history and the history of the nation of Israel. Now we’ll turn to our last topic: the fulfillment of God’s kingdom in the New Testament age.

NEW TESTAMENT

If there’s one thing that all Christians should affirm, it’s this: the heart of Jesus’ ministry, the heart of the entire New Testament, is the gospel. The proclamation of the Christian gospel, or “good news,” is central to our Christian faith. While most of us would agree with this, we often don’t consider just how deeply the Christian good news is rooted in the Old Testament. The good news of the Christian faith is the proclamation that Jesus overcomes the failures of God’s kingdom in the past and succeeds in spreading God’s victorious reign to the ends of the world. This is the good news we believe. It is good news of the kingdom of God.

Listen to the way Matthew summarized Jesus’ preaching in Matthew 4:23:

[Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23).

As we see here, Jesus went about “proclaiming the gospel” or good news. But what was this good news about? It was the good news about “the kingdom”. The good news that we believe and proclaim to others is that Christ fulfills all the Old Testament hopes for the glorious kingdom of God to come to earth as it is in heaven.

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 … “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… 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. Craig S. Keener

We’ll explore God’s kingdom in the New Testament as we’ve explored other stages of biblical history. We’ll look first at what the New Testament says about the place of God’s kingdom. Second, we’ll speak of the people of the kingdom. And third, we’ll look into the progress of the kingdom during the New Testament period. Let’s look first at the place of God’s kingdom in the New Testament.

PLACE

Sadly, many well-meaning followers of Christ believe that New Testament faith has little if anything to do with God’s kingdom on earth. We often hear that the Old Testament was oriented toward the physical world, but New Testament faith is oriented toward immaterial heavenly realities and inward spiritual matters. Now, there are ways in which this is true. Christ’s followers have their citizenship in heaven rather than in earthly kingdoms because, at this moment, our king, Jesus, is in heaven at the right hand of the Father. We also focus on inward spiritual matters because, at this time, the Holy Spirit renews us inwardly even as our bodies suffer corruption. But we have to be very careful here. New Testament faith is not disconnected from God’s earthly kingdom purposes in the Old Testament. Rather, New Testament faith proclaims that Jesus fulfills the last stage of God’s kingdom on earth. He is spreading this kingdom of peace, joy and goodness to the ends of the earth.

In many respects, the New Testament has the same orientation toward the place of God’s kingdom as we find in the Old Testament. First, the New Testament indicates that Christ’s kingdom work began at the geographical center of God’s reign — in the land of Israel. And second, the New Testament also emphasizes how Christ fulfills God’s call for the geographical expansion of his reign to the ends of the earth. Let’s look first at the geographical center of God’s kingdom in the New Testament age.

Center

During the primeval history, Eden and its sacred garden were the geographical centerpiece of God’s kingdom. From there, humanity was to extend God’s rule to the ends of the earth. Later, God built his kingdom in the nation of Israel in the Promised Land. And from there, God’s people began to spread the kingdom to the ends of the earth. This centerpiece of God’s reign on earth was so crucial to Old Testament faith that we shouldn’t be surprised to find that it was also crucial in the life of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah.
Apart from a brief time in Egypt during his childhood, Jesus spent his entire life in the Promised Land. Jesus was born in the land of Israel. He grew up, called his disciples, ministered, died, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven from there. And even on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus gathered many Jews who had been scattered among the nations back to the land of Promise to hear the good news.

To understand why this location of Jesus’ earthly ministry is so important, we must keep in mind what had happened in the Promised Land before Jesus’ birth. Under the rule of David and his descendants, God established Israel as a kingdom in the Promised Land. But toward the end of Old Testament history, a great tragedy occurred. The people of Israel and their kings rebelled against God to such an extent that God drove most Israelites into exile from the land. Gentile nations and the false, demonic gods they served, ruled over even the Israelites who still lived among the ruins of the Promised Land.

Before Jesus came to earth, the children of Israel had suffered under this judgment from God for more than 500 years. Even during Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Promised Land was under the rule of the Roman Empire. The land was filled with sin and darkness. It was overrun with evil spirits. But Jesus came to reverse these dire circumstances and to bring the final stages of God’s kingdom to the earth. Listen to Luke’s account in Luke 4:17-19 of one of Jesus’ earliest sermons at the synagogue in Nazareth:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to [Jesus]. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:17-19).

Here Jesus referred to Old Testament hopes for the eventual success of God’s kingdom purposes. This prophecy, from Isaiah 61, predicted that God would pour out blessings on his people when the judgment of exile came to an end. Jesus mentioned “the poor,” “the captives,” “the blind” and “oppressed” to acknowledge the terrible conditions the people of Israel had endured under the curse of exile. But he also reminded those with him that someone was promised to bring the exile to an end. He will have “the Spirit of the Lord” upon him; someone whom God “anointed.” This Anointed One, the messianic King, will proclaim “the year of the Lord’s favor,” or grace toward his people. He will proclaim “good news,” or gospel, to “the poor,” “liberty to the captives,” “recovery of sight” for the blind, and he will “set at liberty those who are oppressed.” Now listen to what Jesus did in Luke 4:20-21, after reading these words of hope:

[Jesus] rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:20-21).

Jesus boldly proclaimed that he was the one predicted in the Old Testament to end Israel’s exile and to bring the outpouring of God’s blessings to his people. This is why the New Testament focuses so much on what Jesus did in the Promised Land. He came first to
the land of Israel to redeem a remnant of Abraham’s faithful children at the geographical center of God’s kingdom on earth.

Now, it’s important to note that the geographical center of God’s kingdom in the New Testament was the Promised Land. But it’s just as important to keep in view that the final, and utterly successful, geographical expansion of God’s kingdom to the ends of the earth was set in motion by Jesus’ first advent.

**Expansion**

As we noted earlier, in Matthew 6:10 Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God’s kingdom to extend throughout the world when he said:

> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

Throughout his ministry, Jesus kept his disciples’ eyes focused on this worldwide goal. As we read in Matthew 24:14, Jesus told his disciples:

> This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

The message of the good news of the arrival of God’s kingdom was to be spread throughout the world, and then Jesus would return. The New Testament emphasizes that Jesus and his first century apostles and prophets committed themselves to spreading God’s kingdom from the Promised Land to all the nations of the world.

With this orientation toward the place of God’s kingdom in the New Testament in mind, we should turn our attention to the people of the kingdom in the New Testament.

**People**

In the beginning, God ordained that human beings were to spread the kingdom of God. God also called Israel to this task in a special way and ordained the house of David to lead the nation of Israel in fulfilling this calling. But, as we mentioned earlier, by the end of Old Testament history, the house of David and the people of Israel had fallen short of this calling so much that God cursed them with the horrors of exile. And for hundreds of years, the people of Israel suffered under the tyranny of God’s enemies.

So, it’s no wonder that Jesus and his followers spoke of “gospel” or good news. They proclaimed the good news that God’s original design for the human race was about to be fulfilled by Jesus. Jesus would defeat God’s enemies and bless God’s people throughout the earth.

To grasp how the New Testament draws attention to the people of God’s kingdom, we’ll touch on two subjects: first, the service of Christ himself as the supreme, perfectly
righteous image of God; and second, the service of believers as renewed images of God. Let’s consider first Christ’s faithful service as the supreme image of God.

**Christ**

In many circles, Christians have little awareness of why the second person of the Trinity, the eternal *Logos*, became flesh. We rightly affirm that Jesus is fully God and fully man, but we often focus almost entirely on Christ’s deity. And as a result, Christ’s followers today often find it difficult to articulate why the second person of the eternal Trinity became one of us. Why was Jesus’ incarnation necessary? The New Testament’s answer is straightforward: Jesus became a man to fulfill the critical role that God had ordained for his image from the beginning.

There are many ways the New Testament highlights this significance of Christ’s humanity, but we’ll look in just two directions: first, the New Testament teaching that Jesus is the last Adam; and second, the fact that Jesus is God’s priest and king from the house of David. So, what does the New Testament mean when it says that Jesus is the last Adam?

**Last Adam.** Nearly every student of Scripture knows that the apostle Paul drew a parallel between Adam and Christ. In Romans 5:12-21 and other passages, Paul taught that Adam’s sin was so significant in God’s eyes that he condemned the human race to futility and eternal judgment. But, as Paul also explained, Jesus’ perfect obedience to God through his suffering and death on the cross was so significant in God’s eyes that he brought eternal life for all who believe in him. Listen to 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 and the way Paul emphasized the significance of Jesus’ humanity in this regard. Paul wrote:

> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

We are so accustomed to thinking of salvation as a free gift of God’s grace that many of us might have expected Paul to write something like this: For as by a man came death, *by the grace of God* has come also the resurrection of the dead. Now, this would certainly be true because salvation in Christ is by God’s grace. But it is not what the apostle stressed here.

Rather, Paul wrote that just as death came through a man — namely Adam — resurrection from the dead, the goal of salvation, also comes through a *man* — Christ. As the first human being, the first image of God, Adam failed to serve God’s kingdom purposes and brought death to us all. But God never overturned his decree that his kingdom would come to earth through human beings. So, it was necessary for a *man* — a righteous, perfectly obedient image of God — to accomplish what Adam failed to do. For thousands of years, God’s faithful people prayed for such a man. And Christ is the righteous man who brings salvation, who brings resurrection life in God’s kingdom for all who believe in him.
Jesus is the perfect image of God. Jesus is the second Adam, as we read in 1 Corinthians 15:45, the “last Adam,” who was the very power of God. And God’s extraordinary power was demonstrated in Jesus’ perfection because he became a human being who did not commit sin, a human being who was not born from sin. If we look at Matthew 1:19-20, we see that Jesus’ spirit did not come from Joseph or Mary or the lineage of Adam, but from the Holy Spirit. So, his life was a life that was perfect from within; his holiness was perfect from within, even as he wore human flesh and blood.

— Yohanes Praptowarso, Ph.D.

Now in addition to being the last Adam, the New Testament also emphasizes that Christ serves as God’s priest and king in the last stages of the kingdom.

**Priest and King.** You’ll recall that Adam and Eve first served God as royal priests. And God called the nation of Israel to lead the whole human race in service to him as his kingdom of priests. We’ve also seen that, as Israel grew into a full-fledged kingdom, God anointed priests and kings, especially David and his dynasty to serve as his royal priests.
This is why the writer of Hebrews repeatedly stressed Christ’s royal priesthood. As he wrote in Hebrews 4:14:

We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God (Hebrews 4:14).

Jesus offered himself as final sacrifice for sin when he died on the cross. He took on himself the judgment of God on behalf of all who believe in him.

In addition to this, the New Testament also emphasizes that Jesus, the righteous Anointed One of David’s house, is seated forever on David’s throne. Listen to the way the angel Gabriel announced Jesus’ birth to Mary in Luke 1:32-33:

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32-33).

Because Christ perfectly fulfilled the royal priesthood of the house of David, under his leadership the kingdom of God will never end. God’s kingdom purposes will be fulfilled through Jesus’ reign.

As we consider the people of God’s kingdom in the New Testament age, Christ is, without question, the supreme image of God who fulfills the service that God gave to Adam, to Israel and to David’s house. But, the New Testament also stresses that all true believers are joined to Christ, so that the church now serves as the people of God’s kingdom as well.

**Believers**

At the very beginning of the New Testament period, the Christian church consisted nearly exclusively of Jewish people — Abraham’s physical descendants who repented and trusted in Jesus as the Christ. Jesus and his apostles and prophets were Jewish, and everyone who believed on the day of Pentecost was Jewish. In these early days of the New Testament age, God gathered a faithful remnant of Jews from those living in the Promised Land and from those who had been scattered among the Gentiles.

But it wasn’t long before something quite surprising happened. God began to fulfill his promise that Abraham and his seed would spread the blessings of God’s kingdom by bringing Gentiles in large numbers into God’s kingdom. This is why the New Testament speaks of all followers of Christ, including Gentile believers, as renewed images of God. As Paul explained in Ephesians 4:24, believers are to:

Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).

And this is also why, in 1 Peter 2:9, Peter described the New Testament church — consisting of both Jews and Gentiles — as God’s royal priesthood.
There he wrote:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God’s] own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

Here Peter referred to Exodus 19:6, where God first called the nation of Israel his “kingdom of priests.” But Peter applied these words to the church, both Jews and Gentiles. Followers of Christ from every race on earth are adopted into Abraham’s family so that the entire Christian church is “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.” All followers of Christ serve as God’s royal priests in the world. We “proclaim the excellencies of Christ” and fulfill the mission first given to Israel as those who lead the world into the blessings of God.

In 1 Peter 2:8-9, Peter tells God’s people who they are and that they are a chosen race, they are actually people who have been taken out of the world; they belong to God. But they are people with purpose, and that is, they act a role of priesthood where actually they can intercede, not like the old priests who will offer sacrifices, but they actually intercede for people, God’s people… God has placed us here for a purpose, and that is, actually, to declare his excellencies so that many people might get to know him and believe in him. But we are also called to be different, and that is, we are actually holy people. We are to be set apart.

— Dr. Vuyani Sindo

Now that we’ve seen both the place and the people of the kingdom in the New Testament age, we should turn to the progress of the kingdom in the New Testament.

**PROGRESS**

In many ways, the progress of the kingdom of God in the New Testament is one of the most radical teachings that we find in the Scriptures. It was so radical that the vast majority of Jews in the first century rejected Jesus as Messiah. Now, there were many sects and divisions among the Jews in Jesus’ day. Most of us have heard of them: the Pharisees and the Sadducees who held power in Jerusalem, the Zealots who sought to overthrow the Romans with violence, and a number of disenfranchised desert communities. Despite their many differences, they all hoped that the Messiah would soon appear and bring the rapid and decisive victory of God’s kingdom over evil throughout the world. But Jesus and his first century apostles and prophets challenged this widespread expectation. They announced something that had been hidden until Jesus himself explained it: Jesus is the Messiah, but he is going to bring the kingdom of God to earth over a long period of time.
Listen to Matthew 13:31-32 and the way Jesus explained how the kingdom of God was coming to earth:

The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree (Matthew 13:31-32).

In this parable, Jesus declared that instead of coming suddenly and catastrophically, the kingdom of God would begin small, like a mustard seed. But in time, the kingdom would grow and spread to become like a large mustard plant. As the rest of the New Testament tells us, the kingdom began in a relatively small and quiet way with Jesus’ earthly ministry. But in the end, when Christ returns, his kingdom will extend over the entire earth.

In line with this teaching, we’ll speak of the progress of God’s kingdom in the New Testament age as unfolding in three main stages.

The first stage was the inauguration of the kingdom that took place in the ministries of Christ and his first century apostles and prophets. Over 2000 years ago, Jesus inaugurated the final victorious stage of God’s glorious kingdom on earth. This is why, in Ephesians 2:20, the apostle Paul spoke of the church as being, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”

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We may call the second stage of God’s kingdom in Christ the continuation of the kingdom. This is the long period of time in which the kingdom of God grows throughout church history. During this time, Christ continues to enlarge his kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world. And he calls his followers to make spreading the kingdom of God their highest priority. Just as Jesus declared in Matthew 6:33:

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33).
Every day of our lives we are to seek the expansion of God’s kingdom, God’s righteous rule throughout the entire world.

The third stage of God’s kingdom in Christ is the future consummation of the kingdom. This is the time when Christ returns and fulfills God’s plan to turn the whole world into his kingdom. Listen to the way John described this final phase of the kingdom of God in Revelation 11:15:

The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

When Christ returns to the earth, he will defeat every enemy of God, and the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of God and of his Christ. And from that time forth “he shall reign everywhere, forever and ever.”

As followers of Christ, we look back to all that he accomplished in the inauguration of the kingdom. We place our faith and hope in Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that took place two thousand years ago. We also set our faith and hope in what Christ is doing during the continuation of the kingdom. Under the leadership of the ascended Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the church has continued to spread the good news throughout the nations. And of course, we place our faith and hope in what Christ will do in the future at the consummation of the kingdom. Christ will return in glory and bring in the fullness of the new creation filled with the glory of God.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we’ve introduced the unifying theme that ties together everything that appears in the Old Testament: the kingdom of God. We’ve seen how all Old Testament authors believed in a broad sense that God has always been and always will be the unsurpassed sovereign over history. But they also believed in a narrow sense that the reign of God will be manifest over time so that God’s commands will be done on earth as they are in heaven. Reaching this goal of history began in the primeval history. It extended to God’s work in the history of the nation of Israel. And this goal for history is fulfilled in Christ in the New Testament age.

Everyone who’s studied the Old Testament knows that it can be confusing. So, it’s always important to keep the big picture in mind. All Old Testament authors shared a common set of beliefs about the kingdom of God and they wrote their books to further the kingdom of God on earth. They knew that God created the world to become his kingdom, and that he will fill it with his glory, and that one day he will receive endless praise from every creature. God will accomplish this end through human beings, his images. And despite the challenges of evil, this kingdom will not fail. At every turn, the Old Testament anticipates that Jesus is the one who fulfills this purpose of God. Jesus will bring the
kingdom of God to earth. And he will grant all who have faith in him the joy of reigning with him in that glorious kingdom forever.
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Glossary

Aaron – Moses' brother from the tribe of Levi whose family was selected to serve in the specialized office of priest

Abraham – Old Testament patriarch, son of Terah, father of the nation of Israel with whom God made a covenant in Genesis 15 and 17 promising innumerable descendants and a special land

Adam – The first man; husband of Eve; man with whom God made the covenant of foundations in which humanity was to fill and subdue the earth

canon – Authoritative standard; the exclusive collection of documents in the Judeo-Christian tradition recognized as Scripture

covenant – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

David – Second Old Testament king of Israel who received the promise that his descendant would sit on the throne and reign forever

Eden – Hebrew term meaning "pleasant" or "delightful"; name of the garden where God initially placed Adam and Eve

Eve – The first woman; wife of Adam who, after eating the forbidden fruit, received God’s promise that her seed (offspring) would crush Satan’s head

Isaac – Son of Abraham and Sarah; heir of God’s covenant promises

Jacob – Son of Isaac who became the familial head of the twelve tribes of Israel

Levites – Those from the tribe of Levi; served as priests for the nation of Israel

Noah – Man who, under God’s direction, built an ark and survived the Flood; individual with whom God made a universal covenant that promised the enduring stability of nature

omnipresence – Existing in all places

primeval history – The record of the earliest stages of earth’s history in Genesis 1:1–11:9

Promised Land – The land that God promised to give as an inheritance to Abraham and his descendants

Shem – Son of Noah chosen to continue the family line

tov – Hebrew term (transliteration) meaning “good,” “pleasant,” “pleasing,” “beautiful”

vice-regent – A person who acts in place of a regent or other ruler