

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Guide

LESSON
ONE

THE GOAL OF CREATION



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CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE	3
NOTES.....	4
I. INTRODUCTION (0:20)	4
II. OLD TESTAMENT EXPECTATIONS (2:16)	4
A. Creation (3:25)	4
B. Redemption (8:38)	5
1. Adam (11:13)	6
2. Noah (12:12)	6
3. Abraham (13:48)	7
4. Moses (15:14)	7
5. David (20:02)	8
C. Eschaton (21:57)	9
III. NEW TESTAMENT REALIZATIONS (30:14)	11
A. Theological Developments (31:13)	11
B. Historical Complications (38:00)	12
1. Unmet Expectations (38:57)	12
2. Prophetic Mystery (43:36)	13
3. Covenantal Conditionality (46:43)	14
4. Divine Freedom (51:26)	15
C. Adjusted Expectations (54:54)	16
1. Inauguration (59:16)	17
2. Continuation (1:04:36)	18
3. Consummation (1:08:10)	19
IV. CONCLUSION (1:12:30)	19
REVIEW QUESTIONS	20
APPLICATION QUESTIONS	24
GLOSSARY.....	25

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:20)

Eschatology – the study or doctrine of last things

- *eschatos* (ἔσχατος) – last or final
- *logos* (λόγος) – study

II. Old Testament Expectations (2:16)

In the Old Testament, God’s kingdom was expected to unfold in three phases:

- creation – of the universe and its creatures
- redemption – necessitated by humanity’s fall into sin
- eschaton – the ultimate state of the universe, after redemption is complete, when God’s heavenly kingdom fills the earth

A. Creation (3:25)

God’s work of creation is detailed in Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

God intended humanity to be his “vassals” or servant kings to rule over creation on behalf of God, the great “suzerain” or emperor.

Cultural Mandate: God's command to reproduce and create human culture throughout the world (Genesis 1:27-28).

Humanity's directive to "work" and "take care" of the Garden (Genesis 2:15) uses language that also describes the priests' work in the tabernacle (Numbers 3:8).

Human beings are God's royal and priestly images that serve and honor him by ruling over creation on his behalf.

B. Redemption (8:38)

proto-euangelion ("first gospel") – the plan of redemption first introduced after the Fall (Genesis 3:15).

God promised to redeem humanity from the curse of sin. He continued to affirm this expectation through redemptive acts associated with his covenants.

1. Adam (11:13)

After Adam sinned, God offered him salvation through the *proto-euangelion* (Genesis 3:15).

Expectation: God's worldwide kingdom would come to pass, but its growth would be characterized by strife between the children of the serpent and the children of Eve.

From the beginning, the human race has been divided between those who serve God's purposes and those who rebel against God.

2. Noah (12:12)

God made a covenant through Noah never to flood the earth again and to establish the stability of nature (Genesis 8:21–9:17).

Expectation: The growth of God's kingdom, would proceed without further global catastrophes.

The stability of nature was guaranteed only until the end of the present order of creation (Genesis 8:22).

3. Abraham (13:48)

God called Abraham and his descendants to serve him in a special way (Genesis 15, 17, 22).

They were the special nation through whom God would extend redemption to the rest of humanity (Genesis 22:18).

Expectation: God's earthly kingdom would include members from all nations on earth.

4. Moses (15:14)

God confirmed that the Mosaic covenant incorporated and continued the early covenants.

God would bring the covenant blessings to pass, but if his people disobeyed him, he would punish them (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 4; 30).

The worst covenant curse for Israel was exile from the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 4:27-31).

God promised if they repented of their sin and sought him with all their heart and soul, he would restore them to his favor in “later days.”

Expectation: In a future age, God would fulfill all of his covenant promises of blessings for his people and judgment against his enemies.

The later biblical authors also understood the “later days” as the future and final age of blessing after Israel’s return from exile.

5. David (20:02)

God promised to establish the house of David as the permanent dynasty ruling over God’s earthly kingdom (Psalm 89:34-37).

Expectation: God’s kingdom is a real place, populated by real people who will live in perfect harmony with God forever.

C. Eschaton (21:57)

After the reigns of David and Solomon, God's people rebelled and fell into rampant idolatry and sin.

- 930 B.C. – the nation was divided in two:
 - Israel – northern kingdom
 - Judah – southern kingdom

- 722 B.C. – Israel rejected prophetic warnings to repent. God sent the Assyrians to defeat Israel and carry many people into exile.

- 586 B.C. – Judah rejected prophetic warnings to repent. God sent the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and take many people into exile.

The people had broken God's covenants, and they received the great covenant curse of exile.

The prophets reassured God's people that in the last days God would grant them repentance, forgive them, return them to the Promised Land, and bring about his perfect worldwide kingdom (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1; Hosea 3:5).

Expectations for the “last days” created by Isaiah prophecy:

- God would rule over the whole earth from his throne in his temple in Jerusalem.
- Every nation on earth would eagerly serve as part of that kingdom.
- God’s rule would include his righteous judgments.
- Every nation would live in peace.
- God’s kingdom would establish peace and endure forever (Isaiah 2:4; Daniel 2:44).
- One descendant of David would reign forever (Isaiah 9:7).

God’s expected eschatological kingdom was called a “new heavens and new earth” (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22)

The prophets expected God to fulfill the plans he had laid at the beginning of creation, and had elaborated throughout the history of redemption.

III. New Testament Realizations (30:14)

A. Theological Developments (31:13)

Two great ages of Jewish eschatology:

- “this age” (*olam hazeh*) – characterized by sin, exile, suffering, and death; began at the Fall and corresponds to the age of redemption
- “the age to come” (*olam habá*) – the future eschaton when God’s kingdom would fill the earth; characterized by forgiveness, righteousness, peace and eternal life.

Most first-century Jewish sects agreed:

- A catastrophic war would lead to an abrupt transition from one age to the next.
- The Messiah would lead an army of angels and faithful men to victory over Israel’s enemies.
- The Messiah would restore the kingdom to Israel.
- All the Old Testament expectations for God’s kingdom would be fulfilled.
- God’s people would live in peace forever.

By the first century A.D., Israel had lived in exile under foreign domination for centuries.

Many of God’s people thought that the prophecies in Daniel chapters 2 and 7 indicated that their oppression was about to end.

Jesus and the New Testament writers also taught that the Messiah would end “this age” of sin and death and usher in “the age to come” with all its blessings (Mark 10:29-30).

Jesus indicated that he was the Messiah that was expected to bring the transition from this age to the age to come. (Mark 10:29; Matthew 12:32).

Paul associated the triumph of the age to come with Christ, the Messiah (Eph. 1:20-21; 1 Cor. 2:6-8; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Jesus and his apostles and prophets agreed with most other Jews in their day about the basic structure of the eschaton.

B. Historical Complications (38:00)

1. Unmet Expectations (38:57)

Jesus’s disciples experienced tension and confusion over their unmet expectations for him as the Messiah:

- They believed that the Messiah would end this age and usher in the age to come.
- They believed that Jesus was the Messiah.
- They recognized that Jesus hadn’t done what they expected.

After his resurrection, Jesus spent forty days teaching his apostles about the kingdom of God, but they still didn't understand everything (Acts 1:4-6).

God explicitly associated the pouring out of his Spirit with the restoration of the kingdom in the last days (Ezekiel 39:27-29; Joel 2:28-3:2), but never said these events had to be simultaneous.

Jesus insisted that the timing of the kingdom hadn't been revealed to anyone (Acts 1:7-8; Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32).

2. Prophetic Mystery (43:36)

Biblical prophecies had some gaps in the information leading to a range of ways they could be interpreted.

Paul mentioned prophetic mysteries originally hidden in the Old Testament prophetic writings until they were revealed by Jesus (Romans 16:25-26).

The New Testament was written in part to help readers understand those aspects of God's kingdom that were mysterious to earlier audiences.

Later audiences understood that the events introducing the eschaton would take a long time to unfold.

3. **Covenantal Conditionality (46:43)**

God's covenants with his people had conditions:

- blessings if they obeyed
- curses if they disobeyed (e.g., exile from the Promised Land)

The prophecies about Israel's restoration were conditioned upon Israel's repentance and renewed covenant obedience.

Like a potter, God is able "shape" his people according to his preference and discretion (Jeremiah 18:6-10).

When God swears, or takes an oath, or makes a covenant, those promises are *absolutely* sure.

When prophecies don't include promises, their fulfillment isn't guaranteed:

- Genesis 15:7, 8 – Abraham asked God to turn his prophecy into a covenant promise.
- Daniel 9 – God extended Israel's exile another 490 years because they were still breaking his covenant law.

4. **Divine Freedom (51:26)**

God's freedom is emphasized throughout Scripture.

When Nathan prophesied that David's son would die:

- David didn't believe this was a *necessary* outcome, so he repented and humbled himself.
- David asked, "Who knows?" (*mi yodea*), because he knew God was free to save the boy or let him die (2 Samuel 12:22).

Other passages using the Hebrew phrase *mi yodea*:

- Joel 2:14 – Joel encouraged repentance as a way to avoid a prophesied judgment.
- Jonah 3:9 – the king of Nineveh ordered his city to repent hoping that God would spare them.

In the absence of a promise, God is free to fulfill prophecy in whatever way seems best to him.

C. Adjusted Expectations (54:54)

Jesus and his apostles disagreed with Jewish theologians about the transition between this age and the age to come.

In contrast to Jewish expectations, Jesus and his apostles taught that the transition between the ages would *not* happen quickly.

“Inaugurated eschatology” acknowledges that God’s eschatological kingdom has been inaugurated in Christ, but it hasn’t yet come in all its fullness.

Jesus told parables showing that the kingdom of God grows over a long period of time, e.g., Matthew 13:

- a field growing toward harvest
- a mustard tree that grows from a seed
- yeast spreading through a batch of dough

According inaugurated eschatology, the kingdom has come, is coming and will come.

Three stages of “last days” in inaugurated eschatology:

- Inauguration – when the ages began to overlap during Jesus’ life and earthly ministry, including the foundational work done by the apostles.
- Continuation – time when the church builds God’s kingdom to prepare for Christ’s return.
- Consummation – period of the full blessings of the eschaton, ending *this age* and permanently replacing it with *the age to come*.

1. Inauguration (59:16)

Jesus taught that he had already inaugurated God’s earthly kingdom (Luke 16:16; Matthew 11:12).

Jesus said that his miracles proved the presence of God’s kingdom on earth (Luke 11:20; Matthew 12:28).

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the church was also an indication that the last days had begun (Acts 2:1-11, 16-17).

The most frequent way the New Testament refers to the inauguration of the kingdom is through the term “gospel” or “good news”:

- used when a king conquered new territory to announce to the people the “good news” that he was their new king
- used to refer to Israel’s restored kingdom after their exile (Isaiah 52:7)

Jesus and his apostles wanted people to understand that God had defeated his enemies and had begun to reign on earth.

2. Continuation (1:04:36)

God’s kingdom spreads and grows throughout the world, primarily through the work of the church.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) calls us to expand the borders of Christ’s kingdom to all nations until the end of this age.

Jesus governs his earthly kingdom and battles his enemies from his throne in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:25).

3. **Consummation (1:08:10)**

In the eschaton, the Messiah will end this age of sin and death and rule forever from David's throne in Jerusalem.

The greatest eschatological blessings won't be fulfilled until the consummation of God's kingdom, including:

- Jesus' return
- the general resurrection of the dead and the last judgment
- creation of new heavens and a new earth
- everlasting life in glorified bodies
- creation purged of sin's corruption (2 Peter 3:10, 13)
- realization of God's eschatological kingdom, including the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-4)

IV. **Conclusion (1:12:30)**

Application Questions

1. How are you called to fulfill the cultural mandate? In what ways can you exercise the kingly and priestly role of working and taking care of the things over which God given us authority?
2. Genesis 3:15 tells us that, since the Fall, the human race has been divided between those who serve God's purposes and those who rebel against him. How should we as Christians relate to those who rebel against God's will?
3. Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 2:2-4 created a vivid picture of the eschaton. Which element of his prophecy are you most eagerly anticipating? Explain your answer.
4. Jesus didn't fulfill all of the expectations for the last days in his first advent, but he will complete his work when he returns in glory. How does this fact encourage the ministry of the church in the world today?
5. Jesus taught that the timing of his return hasn't been revealed to anyone. With this in mind, how should we evaluate the practice of searching the Bible for clues as to the date of the second coming?
6. How would you respond to someone who claims that God doesn't keep his promises in Scripture?
7. How would you explain "inaugurated eschatology" to a new believer?
8. What does the Great Commission require of churches today? What are some practical ways you can encourage those in your community to "make disciples of all nations"?
9. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

930 BC – Year that the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms

722 BC – Year that Israel, or the “northern kingdom” was conquered by Assyria and taken into exile

586 BC – Year that Judah, or the “southern kingdom” was conquered by Babylon and taken into exile

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

b'aharit hayyamim – Hebrew term (transliteration) meaning “the future”; technical term for “the last days”

consummation – Third and final stage of inaugurated eschatology when Christ will return and fulfill God's ultimate purpose for all of history

continuation – Second or middle stage of inaugurated eschatology; the period of the kingdom of God after Christ's first advent but before the final victory

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

cultural mandate – The command in Genesis 1:28 instructing humanity to develop and rule the creation to display God's glory

Daniel – Prophet taken to Babylon as a young man in the first deportation of 605 B.C.; ministered from at least 605-539 B.C.; known for his ability to interpret dreams and for his devotion to God, even when thrown into a lion's den

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

eschatology – The study or doctrine of the last days

eschaton – The last stage of world history; the last or latter days

eschatos – Greek term (transliteration) meaning "last," "end," "final"

gospel – Literally, "good news"; announcement that God's kingdom came to earth through the person and work of Jesus and that it expands toward its great consummation as God grants salvation to those who receive and trust in Jesus as the Messiah

Great Commission – Christ's appointment of the eleven faithful apostles as his authoritative representatives and his charge to spread the kingdom of God throughout the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20)

inaugurated eschatology – View of the end times that says the age to come has begun (been "inaugurated"), but hasn't yet come in all its fullness; the "already, not yet"

inauguration – First stage in inaugurated eschatology; refers to Christ's first coming and the ministries of his apostles and prophets

Isaiah – Prophet from Judah who ministered from approximately 740-701 B.C. during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah

logos – Greek term (transliteration) meaning "word" or "study"; title assigned to Christ (John 1:1)

Messiah – Hebrew word meaning "anointed one"; the great King from David's royal line who would bring about the transition from this age to the age to come; translated "*Christos*" in Greek

mi yodea – Hebrew term (transliteration) for "Who knows?"; common Hebraic saying meaning that one does not know what the future holds

Moses – Old Testament prophet and deliverer who led the Israelites out of Egypt; man with whom God made a national "covenant of law" and who administered the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant to the Israelites; also appeared with Elijah at Jesus' transfiguration

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

olam habá – Hebrew term (transliteration) for "the age to come"; rabbinical phrase referring to the future age when God will fulfill all of his promises to Israel

olam hazeh – Hebrew term (transliteration) for "this age"; rabbinical phrase referring to the present age of sin, suffering and death that has existed since the Fall

Pentecost – Jewish festival, often called the "Feast of Weeks," that celebrated the early harvest; celebrated by Christians as the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on the early church

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

prophecy – Divinely-inspired proclamation or revelation

proto-euangelion – Theological term for "the first gospel" or the first promise of redemption found in Genesis 3:15

suzerain – A powerful emperor or king that ruled over smaller nations; the more powerful party of a covenant, the one to whom it was necessary to submit

vassal – A king or nation that must submit to a more powerful emperor or king (suzerain)