

KINGDOM PRESENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (1)

KINGDOM PRESENCE (3)



There from the beginning.

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Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (1)
Kingdom Presence (3)
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Contents

Welcome to <i>Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (1)</i>	4
1 The Eternal Kingdom	5
2 Dominion	7
3 Vision of the Kingdom	9
4 Kings and the King	11
5 Kingdom and Covenant	13
6 Israel and the Kingdom	15
7 The King and His Kingdom	17
Questions for Reflection or Discussion	19

Welcome to *Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (1)*

Here is the first of a two-part series considering the presence of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament.

We don't usually think of the Kingdom of God as an Old Testament theme. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah, for sure—but the Kingdom of God? Not so much.

But the Kingdom has been there in the plan and revelation of God from the very beginning. It becomes intertwined with God's covenant as the key to realizing His precious and very great promises. In this first part of our study we'll see how the theme of the Kingdom occurs throughout the book of Genesis and into the rest of God's Law.

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Thank you.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The Eternal Kingdom

*The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty;
The LORD is clothed,
He has girded Himself with strength.
Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved.
Your throne is established from of old;
You are from everlasting.* Psalm 93.1, 2

*The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood,
And the LORD sits as King forever.* Psalm 29.10

*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your Kingdom.* Psalm 45.6 (my translation)

Kingdom confusion

I can think of few Biblical teachings on which it is more important for Christians to be clear than the teaching concerning the Kingdom of God. God has called us to His Kingdom. Jesus has conveyed us into it, and He commands us to seek the Kingdom as the defining priority and motif of everything we do. The Kingdom of God is coming to earth, beginning in the souls and extending through the lives of Kingdom citizens and ambassadors. God is establishing a Kingdom presence here to mirror the rule of King Jesus in heaven, where “everyone says, ‘Glory!’” (Ps. 29.9) and righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit abound without interruption.

The Kingdom of God is the glorious victory Jesus achieved by His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father. It is the rule of King Jesus, by His Spirit, in and through His saints, unto the restoration of the reconciled world to God. To misunderstand the Kingdom of God, or to fail to seek a clear and growing experience of it, is to miss the entire purpose of the Gospel, which is, after all, the *Good News* of the *Kingdom*.

Still, many believers are unclear about the Kingdom.

For many believers, I fear, the idea of the Kingdom of God is just that, an idea, something to think about and ponder, but not something to *know* or *experience*. The Kingdom is a matter of *then and there*, not *here and now*. The Kingdom is something yet to come, following the return of Christ, when Jesus will be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords, and will reign in the new heavens and new earth. In this life, the Kingdom is merely something to long or hope for, and since it is yet to come, it can have little *practical* relevance for our lives in the here and now.

Others may agree that the Kingdom has come, after a fashion, or to some extent, but because it relates only to spiritual matters, it is of but limited application in the day to day realities of our lives in culture and society. Whatever the Kingdom presence may be or entail, it is confined to “spiritual” concerns and therefore relates primarily to what we do in church.

Perhaps most Christians do not regard the Kingdom of God as a primary Biblical theme, one so central to the unfolding of the divine economy that, to miss it, is not merely to miss the Good News by a little, but to miss it altogether.

So a certain amount of confusion exists among the followers of Christ in our day regarding the nature and presence of the Kingdom of God, and even whether this is a central theme of Scripture.

Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (1)

The Kingdom and the saints of Scripture

Throughout the Scriptures, God's people have understood the importance of the Kingdom of God, and have grasped at least some of the implications and expectations that accompany this important teaching.

From Adam to the apostles, the Kingdom of God danced in the minds of Biblical saints, glittering and glistening with portent, pondered and hoped for, to a greater or lesser extent, and with growing clarity. If we could enter the mind of those Biblical Kingdom visionaries, we might discover a new, more complete, and more vital understanding of the Kingdom of God, one that can take our *idea* about the Kingdom out of the realm of mere thought and into our daily walk with the Lord, in every area of life, establishing a Kingdom presence by all we are and do.

The promise of the Kingdom emerges like distant sign-posts throughout the course of the Old Testament, pointing to the time in the New Testament when Jesus and His Spirit would establish a Kingdom presence that would turn the world rightside-up for God and His glory.

Our eternal King

Our God is, after all, the *eternal* God and King. He is *from* forever and *unto* forever, King and Lord and Sovereign without end. Whatever He has made, He rules, and has ruled it from the beginning. Whatever He has charged or privileged people with concerning creation, He expects that we should undertake under the scope of His rule and according to the purpose and protocols of His dominion.

The eternal Kingdom of God, as Jesus explained, is not *of* this world (Jn. 18.36). It does not originate in this world; therefore, it is not bound by the protocols or limitations of this world. And is not to be known or sought in the manner of earthly domains. Our Biblical forebears understood this, yet they also understood that the *reality* of the Kingdom—its eternal character, power, and presence—meant that their experience of life should be defined by parameters and protocols *from above* or *from beyond* this merely temporal domain. The great saints of the Bible fixed their thoughts on what they understood of the Kingdom of God and, with greater or lesser success, brought their lives into line with their understanding of this eternal, sure, and indestructible domain.

In this part of our study of “The Kingdom Presence”, we’re going to enter the Kingdom mindset and vision of our Biblical forebears, so that we might discover the centrality of the Kingdom of God in Scripture, and that the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God might increasingly become the framework, reality, and *experience* of every aspect of our lives.

For reflection

1. What is your understanding of the Kingdom of God? How do you experience the Kingdom presence?
2. In what ways is the Kingdom of God a presence in your soul?
3. How does the Kingdom presence come to reality through your deeds and words each day?

Next steps—Preparation: Spend some time in prayer meditating on the three questions above. Ask God to lead you to a deeper understanding and more consistent sense of the presence of the Kingdom in your daily life.

2 Dominion

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;

A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. Psalm 45.6 (my translation)

Truly, this only I have found:

That God made man upright,

But they have sought out many schemes. Ecclesiastes 7.29

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1.28

From the beginning

In creating the cosmos—the earth and everything in it, the angels, and all the heavenly bodies that populate the vast domain of space—God’s purpose was to extend His self-rule into a material realm, so that the righteousness, peace, and joy He knew eternally might be extended to a world of creatures, overseen, cared for, and developed by human beings made in God’s own image.

God did not need creation. He does not need people. Rather, the nature of His eternal self-rule—His eternal Kingdom—is to share His grace and goodness, first among the Persons of the Godhead, then into the world of creatures and people. Grace moved God to create, and for the sake of the continuation and expansion of His grace and goodness, God appointed His image-bearers to have dominion—rule—over the creation.

The idea of rule and dominion under God is the first glimmer of God’s eternal Kingdom coming on earth as it exists in God Himself and in heaven where God dwells. Thus the Kingdom of God has been present from the first days of humankind’s sojourn on the earth. On the day God created Adam and Eve, He instilled in them an idea of dominion—a call to exercise authority, by God’s command and according to His purposes, throughout creation.

God made Adam and Eve upright—perfect in righteousness, peace, and joy, though limited by their being creatures—and He intended that their lives and work should reflect His rule of uprightness so that all the earth would be filled with the goodness of the Lord and the knowledge of His glory.

First in the Kingdom

As the first couple considered this calling to exercise dominion, the idea of the Kingdom of God as we think of it would not have entered their minds. This understanding would only precipitate gradually as God unfolded His covenant relationship with His people over the entire course of redemptive history.

Nevertheless, Adam and Eve were given *some* understanding of what it means to exercise dominion. Thus, it is essential that we try to understand, if only in broad outlines, what God intended for Adam and Eve and what they must have understood to be involved in carrying out this calling to realize the presence of God’s Kingdom on earth. For what God intended for our first parents He must likewise intend for us. We are His image-bearers today, and the task of seeking the Kingdom falls as surely on us as it did on Adam and Eve.

To Adam and Eve God first revealed the idea of His Kingdom. He appointed them to take up the work of subduing and exercising dominion and of bearing fruit to fill the earth with Kingdom-seekers, thus developing and extending the “very good” conditions on earth which obtained at the end of the creation week (Gen. 1.31)

Four tasks

As Adam, and, after her creation, Eve, reflected on God’s calling to exercise dominion, four specific efforts

would have taken shape in their minds.

First, they must have considered that they would need to *explore the broad parameters* of their calling. They had been placed in a garden filled with creatures and invested with the resources for future development and use. Before they could begin to exercise dominion over the earth, they would first have to discover what exercising dominion meant within the area immediately assigned to them.

That process of *exploration* entailed many new things: naming the animals; tending to the many and various plants and trees; finding out about minerals hidden in the earth; learning the various ways of harnessing and using flowing water; and so forth (Gen. 2.8-15). Undoubtedly every day of their lives would have included some *work of exploration*, of seeking to understand the scope and nature of their dominion calling with respect to the whole of the creation around them.

Second, Adam and Eve would have to *master certain skills* of development related to each of the areas of exploration. Naming animals is one thing; helping them to fulfill their appointed purposes requires a variety of skills. Pruning fruit trees and planting a new crop of vegetables are not quite the same. Undoubtedly, as they began to employ these various skills, they would have created certain kinds of culture to aid them.

The third task was one of *maintenance* or *vigilance*. Adam and Eve were to *defend the creation* against any threat to the goodness of God and their dominion over the garden. This is the sense of Genesis 2.15, which we can gather from the fact that the same verb, *shamar*, normally translated “keep”, is used in Genesis 3.24 to describe the action of the cherubim in preventing Adam and Eve from returning to the garden. It would be Adam’s failure in this duty that led to their fall into sin.

Finally, Adam and Eve were to *fill the earth* with Kingdom-seekers like themselves. We can imagine that, had the fall into sin not intervened, the work Adam and Eve, and their children with them and after them, would have done in subduing the earth and exercising dominion over the creatures would have been one of continuous fruitfulness, beauty, bounty, satisfaction, and joy spreading beyond the garden to the ends of the earth.

Heaven on earth—just as God planned, as we are called to seek, and as will one day be fully realized.

For reflection

1. How does our first parents’ work of exploring, developing and using skills, and maintaining vigilance apply to your own work of seeking the Kingdom of God?
2. How has God appointed for us to “be fruitful and multiply” in our labors?
3. How is your Personal Mission Field like the garden of Eden?

Next steps—Preparation: Your Personal Mission Field is to you as the garden was to Adam and Eve. How do the works appointed to them apply to you? Which of these will you be engaged in today?

3 Vision of the Kingdom

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1.28

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. Genesis 2.15

The three tasks of dominion

From the beginning, God instructed His people in the work of *rule*, of exercising dominion over the creation. Through Adam, Eve, and their offspring, God intended to bring the eternal righteousness, peace, and joy that He knew within Himself to the earth, that the creatures He had made could share in His blessedness.

His heavenly Kingdom would become an earthly paradise as Adam and Eve continued faithful in their calling to His Kingdom and glory.

God created Adam and Eve in a very good place (Gen. 1.31). The world, at the end of the creation week, was neither perfect nor complete; it was, however, very good, precisely what God intended and ready for the further development and flourishing that would come under the stewardship of His people. God’s appointment to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue and exercise dominion over the creation was aimed at increasing the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

To fulfill their appointed calling, Adam and Eve understood they would have to commit to learning, working in and on their environment, and defending their assigned mission field against whatever might seek to obstruct or undermine their dominion efforts and compromise the good purposes of God. Their failure in this part of their mandate would upset, complicate, and impose limitations on the rest of their calling. But it would not alter God’s plan for His Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

Prior to their fall into sin, Adam and Eve must have talked frequently and excitedly about the possibilities contained in their mandate. What vision captured their minds, hearts, and consciences as they set about their work in those first days, prior to the fall?

A vision of dominion

What could Adam and Eve “see”, in their minds? What did they desire to realize, and what priorities guided their daily lives? As they pursued the disciplines of exploration (learning), development, and defense, what objectives did they seek from their daily work? What did they “see” as the fruit of their seeking the presence of God’s rule through their labors?

We can, of course, only speculate on such questions. Everyone has some vision that guides them through the day—what they plan to do, hope for, would like to see happen, and so forth. Our first parents were no different, except that the vision that guided them was revealed and reinforced by God. What they saw with the eye of faith would have reflected God’s vision for the coming of His Kingdom on earth.

What did that vision entail?

Many offspring—children, grandchildren, and more—would help Adam and Eve improve and extend the garden and its goodness, until enough children had been born, raised, and engaged in the work of having dominion that the entire earth would become a garden before the Lord. They could have had no complete sense of the size of the earth, but they could doubtless imagine their bounteous and beautiful garden expanding with each successive generation of offspring.

They must also have envisioned a *peaceable, orderly, joyful, and fruitful existence* in cooperation with all the

Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (1)

creatures of the garden, both plants and animals, for the mutual benefit and enrichment of rulers and ruled alike.

In their minds they must have considered there would be opportunities for additional *exploration and development* of the many unseen wonders and powers beyond the garden (minerals, flowing rivers, precious metals). They may have dreamed and talked about things they could make from, or ways to use, these resources to adorn the garden and bless its inhabitants. That is, they must have had some idea of culture, of the making of things useful and beautiful to assist them in their calling.

And daily they would have looked forward to *continuous and deepening fellowship in divine blessings*, in the Presence and with the guidance of God, to help them in their work and to nurture and develop them in their relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

Had Adam and Eve been able to keep this vision in mind, and to be guided by it, the calamity of the fall might never have occurred.

A continuing call and idea

Yet, even after the fall, and despite their having failed in their mandate to guard the garden, we see the idea of dominion still at work in the first couple. The entry of sin into their lives, and through them, to the creation itself, did not cancel or nullify the idea of dominion. Adam and Eve continued to work the ground, bear and raise children, teach the story of their creation and fall, and guide their offspring in making culture and seeking the Lord through worship. (Gen. 4).

The sense of their dominion calling remained in them by virtue of their being the image-bearers of God and His having redeemed them graciously from their transgression. They bore the stain and effects of sin in their bodies, as did the creation around them; however, renewed in their souls and restored to the blessing of God, they immediately took up the work of dominion, pursuing God's original intention for them, according to His ongoing command and promise, and despite the obstacles created by their fallen condition.

From these first Kingdom servants, therefore we may learn (1) the tasks of dominion: exploration (learning), development, and defense of the creation to which we are assigned; (2) the importance of staying within the blessing and Word of God as the only secure place for realizing the blessings of dominion; (3) and seeing to it that no obstacle, hindrance, or threat from the fallen world or our own sin shall keep us from seeking the Kingdom of God on earth, or from passing that vision and calling on to the generations that follow us.

We are faithful to God and to our first covenant parents when we embrace the desire for Kingdom presence as they did and make it the defining priority of our daily experience in the Lord.

For reflection

1. How would you describe the state of your "exploration" or "learning" at this time?
2. In what ways are you working to develop the goodness of God throughout your "garden"?
3. How can you expand and clarify your vision of the Kingdom presence coming in and through you?

Next steps—Preparation: Reflect on your calling to learn, work, and guard against sin in seeking the Kingdom of God. How can you begin each day refreshing this vision in your mind?

4 Kings and the King

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said:

*“Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”
And he gave him a tithe of all. Genesis 14.18-20*

“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.” Genesis 17.5-7

*God reigns over the nations;
God sits on His holy throne.
The princes of the people have gathered together,
The people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
He is greatly exalted. Psalm 47.8, 9*

No king but God

Abraham had some experience of earthly kingdoms, and it wasn't all that great. Shortly after his appearing in Canaan, two episodes involving earthly kings must have colored Abraham's view of such people in something of a negative light.

In Genesis 12 Abraham—then, Abram—fled to Egypt to escape a famine, an event God had sent to test and strengthen his faith, a test which he failed. Abram feared for his life before the king of Egypt; so, to secure his own wellbeing, he jeopardized his wife's purity. For this he was soundly rebuked by Pharaoh and sent packing back to Canaan. The embarrassment of this incident must have stung deeply.

Shortly after that, four kings and their armies came marauding through Abram's neighborhood, defeating five local rulers and, in the process, carrying off Abram's nephew, Lot. It took a bold rapid-strike effort on Abram's part to gain back both Lot and all the spoil captured from the local rulers.

When the defeated kings wanted to settle-up with Abram, he would have nothing of it. He insisted that God only was his King, and he would not allow himself to be put in the position of being beholden to or appearing to have been enriched by anyone other than Him (Gen. 14.17-24). Abram must have reflected that earthly kings can be a greedy, self-indulgent lot. He understood himself to be a servant of the one true King and, thus, of His Kingdom on earth.

At the same time, Abram acknowledged the legitimacy of an earthly king who was a priest of God and ruler of a kingdom of peace. Melchizedek, whose name means “King of Righteousness”, was the ruler of Salem—which means “Peace.” He was also a priest of God Most High, the same God Who had made such precious and very great promises to Abram and sent him to seek the Lord in the land of Canaan (Gen. 12.1-3; cf. 2 Pet. 1.4). To Melchizedek Abram gave a tithe of everything he had taken from the marauding kings, but only after Melchizedek had blessed him in the name of God, the King Most High.

We note that Melchizedek—whom most commentators understand to have been a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ—addressed Abram as “Possessor of heaven and earth”. This phrase refers to Abram, not God (cf. Rom. 4.13). This is clear from the parallel structure of verses 19 and 20, in which first Abram is

blessed and described, then God is blessed and described. Melchizedek acknowledged that Abram was heir of the earth and heaven, and his calling was to bring heaven's presence to the world.

A vision of kings to come

When God appeared again to Abram in Genesis 17, it was for the express purpose of enlarging the patriarch's understanding of the divine purpose. God had made and sealed His covenant with Abram, promising that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed. In Genesis 17 God made it clear that Abram must learn to think about those covenant promises more broadly than simply his immediate family. He would become the father of "a multitude of nations." Thus he was to be called Abraham, rather than Abram, from this point forward.

Over those nations kings would be set, kings perhaps like Melchizedek, who ruled in righteousness and peace. And those kings, as part of God's covenant, would be administrators of divine blessing according to the covenant promises of God. Abraham knew something of what it meant to enjoy the promises of God, to see an earthly kingdom administered by one who was divinely appointed and had divine approval. Thus, the prospect of becoming the father of perhaps *many* such kings must have further added to Abraham's determination to seek the promises of God according to whatever God required of him.

Genesis 22 would prove both the depths of Abraham's trust and the reliability of God's promises.

Twice more, for emphasis

One additional pair of incidents must have reinforced Abraham's growing sense of what God intended to do through him. In Genesis 20 Abraham repeated his mistake with Pharaoh before the pagan king, Abimelech. He explained his duplicity by saying that he didn't think the fear of God had reached this place, and so he feared for his own life.

But God spoke to this pagan king, revealing Abraham's identity and warning him not to harm this man or his wife, since he was a prophet. This time, instead of merely fleeing back to Canaan with his tail between his legs, Abraham blessed Abimelech in the name of the Lord (v. 17) and brought restoration and healing to his kingdom.

This was followed in Genesis 21 by the same Abimelech coming to Abraham, acknowledging his greatness and the fact of his friendship with God (v. 22), and seeking defense within God's power in a covenant with Abraham. What a strange and wonderful turn of events! The same king Abraham had feared, then blessed and restored, now came to Abraham, fearing the God in Whose Name he had been blessed and restored, and seeking friendship and protection from the one who had dispensed the blessings of the Lord.

We can believe that this incident affected how Abraham envisioned those kings and nations, descending from him, who would learn to possess earth and heaven in submission to the King of righteousness and peace. Hopefully, it will help to shape our view of the Kingdom presence as well.

For reflection

1. The promises made to Abraham are for all who believe as he did (Rom. 4.13-17). How do the promises made to Abraham fit into our calling to seek the Kingdom and glory of God?
2. How does the promise that Abraham would be "possessor of heaven and earth" or "heir of the world" relate to you and your Personal Mission Field?
3. What can you do to bring more Kingdom presence into your life?

Next steps—Conversation: Do you think Christians today believe the Kingdom of God should have any impact on the kingdoms of this world? Ask a few of your Christian friends.

5 Kingdom and Covenant

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." Genesis 17.1, 2

God's covenant

When we think of Abraham, we tend to focus more in terms of "covenant" than of "Kingdom." God had called Abraham—then Abram—from his home in Ur of the Chaldees to enter with Him into a covenant of promise, in which he would know blessings from God and become a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12.1-3). That covenant brings forward all that God had spoken to Adam and Noah—about having dominion and increasing over all the earth—and becomes a defining motif for all subsequent unfolding of divine revelation, and all further understanding of the coming Kingdom of God.

God's covenant, those exceeding great and precious promises which are only fully realized in Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1.2-4; 2 Cor. 1.19, 20), provides the bond between God and His people, for the realization of which His Kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven.

We should note two important features of God's covenant as it relates to the idea of exercising dominion, or, the Kingdom of God.

Covenant and dominion

First, God clearly connected His covenant with Abraham to the covenant He had established with Adam and Eve. While the word, "covenant", does not occur with Adam and Eve, all the hallmarks of a covenant relationship are visible between them: God's gracious initiative, His promises of blessing, and the conditions on which such promises may be realized. With Noah, first (Gen. 6.18; 9.9), then with Abraham, the idea of "covenant" becomes a defining term in thinking about God's relationship with His people and His people's mission on earth.

The phrase repeated here in our text, "multiply you exceedingly", takes the mandate given to Adam and Eve and places it squarely within the covenant God was making with Abraham. God's covenant with Adam and Eve is being continued and extended with Abraham. We can assume that everything else entailed in that original mandate—learning, working, and guarding—was brought forward in God's covenant with Abraham as well. The covenant with Adam was not replaced by the covenant with Abraham; rather, it was clarified, enlarged, and extended.

Second, as we have seen, Abraham's experience within the covenant and promises of God involved entanglements with earthly kings, and these could be difficult and demanding. For Abraham, therefore, such entanglements had always to be engaged with an eye to the Most High King and His promises. Abraham would have understood that whatever his King on High had in mind for him—whatever those precious and very great promises might entail, and however they might unfold—it would involve other people and their kingdoms and rulers.

God's covenant, Abraham would have understood, would be administered, realized, and extended among and within the earthly domains of kings and kingdoms, some of which, as we have seen, would be the direct descendants of Abraham and heirs of God's mandates and promises.

Thus, as readily as we think about covenant in our relationship with God—Old Covenant, New Covenant—so must we, at the same time, think of God's Kingdom. God's covenant provides the framework of divine faithfulness and blessing, and God's Kingdom provides the administrative economy which shapes His people into a Kingdom and priests. Covenant and Kingdom go hand-in-hand.

A vision enlarged?

Abraham's vision of what God had promised was clarified, enriched, and enlarged by his entanglements with earthly kings and dominions. Doubtless, he could see, down the corridors of history, earthly kings seeking the blessing of God within the context of His covenant, submitting to His rule and protection, coming to know restoration, healing, blessing, and the goodness of the Lord in their kingdoms through those who are friends of God. Perhaps even becoming rulers presiding over kingdoms characterized by righteousness and peace, like Melchizedek.

And did Abraham envision earthly kings living at peace with, and on the terms of, those who possessed the promises of God, as Abimelech had sought with him? Were the promised blessings of God to be administered among earthly cultures and societies by those who would live according to the rule of the eternal King?

Surely Abraham, thinking about his own relationship with earthly kings, and reflecting on God's promises and the events which followed his change of name, must have considered that God intended the earth to include nations ruled by kings who knew the blessings of God, who entered into covenant relationship with Him, sought His promises and protection, and would become guarantors of those same promises to the people in their charge. Ultimately, indeed, the kingdoms of this world would become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ. Could Abraham see that far into the covenant and Kingdom of God?

Precisely how this would come to pass, and what wonders God would accomplish along the way—none of this was made clear to Abraham. He *trusted in what he had heard and seen from God* in his experience, and this was enough for him to continue seeking the promises of God in his day.

This also must be our commitment. We can know what God has promised concerning His Kingdom and its unfolding presence. And we can know that His promises and covenant will never fail. Thus, we can commit ourselves to a greater realization of Kingdom presence as we, like Abraham, hold fast to and live toward the promises of God's covenant.

For reflection

1. Summarize the promises God made in His covenant in Genesis 12.1-3.
2. How can you see that these promises are indeed all fulfilled in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1.19, 20)?
3. How should these promises of God influence or affect the way we seek the Kingdom presence of God?

Next steps—Conversation: Suppose a new believer asked you what Jesus meant when He said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6.33). How would you explain that mandate?

6 Israel and the Kingdom

*“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father’s children shall bow down before you.
Judah is a lion’s whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?
The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.
Binding his donkey to the vine,
And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine,
He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.”* Genesis 49:8-11

A King from Judah

In Genesis 49, Jacob blessed his sons and prophesied concerning their future roles in the divine economy. Perhaps surprisingly—since Judah was neither the firstborn nor had served as Israel’s savior, like Joseph had—the promise of dominion, rule, kingship, blessing, and a kingdom was granted through Judah and the tribe that would descend from him.

Judah would receive the praise of the other tribes of Israel (v. 8). All the children of Jacob would bow before and worship in the presence of Judah (v. 8). Judah would be like a lion to protect the people of God (v. 9; cf. Rev. 5:5). Judah would receive the “scepter”, the symbol of dominion, rule, and kingship (v. 10), and a dynasty of rulers would descend from Judah, ending only when one named “Shiloh” appeared. With Him, the scepter finds its final and eternal repository (v. 10). Shiloh would be recognizable by being identified with a donkey and her colt, and by having “washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes” (v. 11).

And to Shiloh would be “the obedience of all the peoples” (not “people”, as in NKJV). All peoples and families of the earth would know the blessing of God’s covenant promises under the scepter of Shiloh. In Shiloh, the promises of God’s covenant and the mandate of dominion come together for the blessing of the world.

Who is Shiloh?

The word *Shiloh* means something like “he whose it is” or even “that which belongs to him” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs). It seems to be a contraction of several words to make a proper name. One was coming, descending from the tribe of Judah, for whom “it”—the scepter of rule—had been determined and prepared. The symbol of Shiloh’s rule—the scepter—would be one of uprightness (Ps. 45:6). That is, the purpose of Shiloh’s reign would be to return people and the creation to their original condition of righteousness, peace, and joy—uprightness (Eccl 7:29). His rule would encompass not merely the people of Israel but all peoples, thus bringing together in Shiloh’s rule the promise to Abraham of blessing the families of the earth.

Shiloh inherits an eternal dominion, since no other kings or rulers shall follow Him. He is the end of the line of Judah’s dynasty and the beginning of the covenantal rule promised to Adam and Abraham. Shiloh is thus the “one like a Son of Man” in Daniel 7:13-18. He receives the Kingdom from the Most High God and gives it to the saints to seek and advance on earth, a Kingdom prepared for them from before the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34).

Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (1)

It is significant that the place where Israel set up the Lord's tabernacle in the land of promise was named Shiloh. The Presence of God was situated in Shiloh. By doing so the people of Israel pointed forward to the time when God's covenant and Kingdom would be united in that great Shiloh yet to come, He Who embodied the rule and promises of God.

Shiloh continued to host the tabernacle of God until it was replaced by the temple under King Solomon. It remained a symbol of the covenant and dominion of God even into the days of the prophets, who looked back to Shiloh to remember the promised coming Ruler of all peoples.

Jesus, Who entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and her colt, and Whose garments were drenched with His own blood; Jesus, Who gave us the wine and bread to remember and participate in Him; Jesus, to Whom the Father gave the eternal Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—Jesus is Shiloh, He for Whom the Kingdom was prepared and to Whom alone it belongs.

Sharpened focus

Already, in the first book of the Bible, the presence of the Kingdom, the coming of a realm of dominion unto righteousness, is announced, foretold, and promised. The focus is increasingly sharpened from a garden in Eden to a descendant of Judah Who will rule all peoples, and for Whom the eternal and upright Kingdom of God has been prepared.

That focus on Judah and Shiloh continues throughout the Old Testament and into the New, until the complete and final realization of this promise to Jacob would come in the last days, during which the “kingdoms of this world” become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11.15).

But the people of God must make no mistake about the true nature of this Kingdom and the presence it brings into the world. The remainder of the Old Testament will help the people of God to see that the Kingdom prepared for Shiloh is a Kingdom “not of this world” (Jn. 18.36). The economy that unfolds around that Kingdom is not like that of the world, and the purpose of this dominion and rule is not to dominate but to serve, not to enslave but to liberate, not to enrich with worldly treasures but to lavish with eternal and unfading treasures in heaven.

What we will find throughout the rest of the Old Testament is the continuing Kingdom story unfolding along lines that point clearly to Shiloh and the eternal Kingdom that will become present with Him.

For reflection

1. What have we seen of the presence of the Kingdom in the book of Genesis?
2. How should this prepare us for reading the rest of the Old Testament?
3. How would you define the Kingdom of God, based on what we've seen in Genesis?

Next steps—Preparation: Jesus taught us to pray for the coming of the Kingdom (Matt. 6.10). How should you pray for this in view of what we have seen thus far about the Kingdom presence in Genesis?

7 The King and His Kingdom

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Exodus 19.5, 6

“‘When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.” Deuteronomy 17.14, 15

A growing sense

By the time Israel had settled in Egypt, the idea of a kingdom, involving them as a people specially chosen by God, had begun to gain some traction in the thinking of their leaders.

Adam and Eve had passed down the notion of “dominion” so that all those who heard their story must have pondered their own lives in something of that light. As human beings and, more specifically, as those descended from Adam and Eve through Abraham, many among the people of Israel would have understood that they had a duty to learn as much as they could, to work at ordering, managing, and developing their places and possessions, and to guard these against corruption or loss. It should not surprise us that those who received and acted on this story—from Seth and Noah to Abraham and the patriarchs—became fruitful and prospered in their endeavors.

Moreover, from Abraham the idea of a rule characterized by righteousness and peace—like the rule of Melchizedek—and a heritage of kings and nations in which God’s blessings would be known, began to inform and shape the story of God’s covenant people. Covenant and kingdom were becoming intertwined in the hopes and dreams of the faithful.

It thus seems perfectly in line with this growing trajectory that Jacob should have prophesied of his son, Judah, that a King would descend from him, One for whom dominion and rule had been prepared, and that He would exercise that dominion and rule not only over the covenant people but all the nations and peoples of the earth as well (Gen. 49.8-11).

Israel’s growing prosperity during those early years in Egypt must have fueled the thoughts and hopes of those who clung to these promises. But their hopes would be sidelined by the cruelty of a king who cared not a whit for their history or aspirations, and who saw them only as a means to realize his own selfish ambitions (Ex. 1.8ff).

A vision recovered

By the time Moses appeared to lead Israel out of captivity in Egypt, the people of God understood well the kind of power an earthly king could wield. It would fall to Moses to help them put away their fears of such human rulers and recover their vision of the kingdom presence God was preparing for them.

By codifying the Torah (Law) into a body of literature, and instructing the fathers of Israel to teach this Law to their children, Moses restored in the minds of God’s covenant people what years of slavery and oppression had obscured: They were to be a kingdom, a kingdom belonging to God. Their future hopes and the promises of God’s covenant would be bound up in Moses’ vision of their relationship with God and the way He intended to bring them into the fullness of His precious and very great promises.

It seems the expectation was always alive in the minds of God’s people that, as a kingdom and priests, they should have a king. This was in line with what had been prophesied about Judah. Thus God, knowing the

Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (1)

people would ask for a king once they had settled in the land of promise, gave through Moses strict guidelines as to whom they might appoint to this office and how their king should serve.

A kingdom of priests

First, however, God would have to deliver His people from the fear of earthly kings and reorient their thinking about kings and kingdoms within a different framework. What God intended for them, what He was preparing them to be, would require of them a measure of trust, courage, and hope that Israel, in captivity to Pharaoh, had long since despaired of knowing.

The destruction of Pharaoh and his army, and the later defeat of the Canannite kings encountered *en route* to the plains of Moab must have persuaded Moses, Joshua, and the people of Israel that no earthly king could stand in the way of what God intended for His people. He had taken Israel as *His* kingdom, and He would rule them for righteousness, peace, and abundant blessing, as long as they dwelled within the safe parameters of His covenant and Law (Deut. 28.1-14). Every Israelite would be a priest unto God, observing His rule and honoring Him with sacrifices and daily lives of justice, righteousness, and love.

And every king was to be a student of the Law of God (Deut. 17.18-20) and to rule in such a way that the blessings promised in that Law should abound throughout the kingdom. The king would govern the people as God's own chosen agent and proxy, ruling His people as God Himself would, so that they would be wise and holy, a witness and a marvel to all the nations (Deut. 4.5-8).

Thus, the idea of kingdom and its importance in the life of God's covenant people continued to grow throughout those early days of the Old Testament. The ideas of dominion and rule, given to Adam and Eve and carried forward through Abraham and the patriarchs, became bound up in the covenant struck at Sinai and in God's promising that Israel would be a kingdom ruled by God Himself. Israel was to understand that the Lord "was king in Jeshurun,/ When the leaders of the people were gathered, /All the tribes of Israel together" (Deut. 33.5).

Dominion, covenant, and kingdom: With Moses these ideas were brought forward, consolidated, and expanded; and with those ideas, a vision of God's Kingdom would begin to be greatly enlarged and enhanced.

For reflection

1. In your own words, sum up the idea of kingdom as it developed from Adam to Moses.
2. What does that suggest about the centrality of this idea for the remainder of the Old Testament?
3. What did God promise His people as a result of the Kingdom's presence in and through them?

Next steps—Transformation: Are you beginning to think differently about the Kingdom of God and its presence on earth as it is in heaven? How has this brief survey of the Old Testament's view of the Kingdom helped to shape or change your thinking?

Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (1)

For reflection or discussion

1. Briefly trace the idea of “dominion” or “kingdom” from Adam to Moses.
2. How can you see the kingdom idea growing throughout this period?
3. Kingdom is thus an important Old Testament idea from the very beginning. Why should this be important for us to know?
4. How were the ideas of kingdom and covenant related during this period?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this part of our study of the Kingdom presence?

For prayer:

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