

KINGDOM PRESENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (2)

THE KINGDOM PRESENCE (4)



Prophecies of a coming King and His Kingdom.

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A ReVision Study from

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (2)
The Kingdom Presence (4)
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The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

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Welcome to *Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (2)*

As the promises of Abraham slipped through the fingers of God's wayward people, even the faithful among them must have wondered if God had changed His mind, and His covenant was no longer valid. Had the people of God at last and finally forfeited their privileges, and the promise of a kingdom, through their unbelief and disobedience?

The prophetic vision of the coming Kingdom of God grows like a gathering storm—a storm of drenching grace and glory—throughout the prophetic literature, leaving the Old Testament to close, at least for the faithful, with a powerful expectation of the soon and sudden appearing of a glorious, divine intervention in the affairs of men and nations: the coming of God's Kingdom, and of His promised King.

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Thank you.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Dynasty and Beyond

*“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 langiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”* Genesis 49.8-10

“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.” Deuteronomy 17.18-20

Bridge to the Kingdom

We need to back-and-fill a bit at this point, since Moses represents in many ways a bridge to a fuller, broader understanding of God and His Kingdom.

We recall that Moses is the author of the Law of God, the first five books of the Bible, as Jesus intimated in John 7.22. His purpose in compiling and writing these books was to establish Israel as a people directly descended from God through Adam, Abraham, and the patriarchs. They were a people of God’s covenant, mandated to rule the earth and exercise dominion under their Most High King.

Moses brings the covenant with Abraham forward to the people of Israel, who, in certain ways, had lost their identity during the 400 years of captivity in Egypt. Moses brought them out and renewed them in God’s covenant at Mt. Sinai. Then he pointed through that covenant to a coming kingdom and dynasty by which, and in submission to whom, the people would realize the precious and very great promises of God and be the envy of the surrounding nations.

Kingdom and covenant continue to come together and be enlarged under the teaching and leadership of Moses. And this is especially so as Moses points forward to an earthly king, a dynasty of kings, and a coming Ruler for Whom all this kingdom and covenant have been especially prepared.

A dynasty of kings

Through Moses, God instructed His people to embrace the notion of kingdom and kingship—an idea and promise first vetted through Abraham, then focused by Jacob, Abraham’s grandson. God promised to create a dynasty descending through the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49.8-11) and give His people a king when they came into the land (Deut. 17.14-20).

The kings who would rule in Israel, however, were not to be anything like the pagan kings Israel had known. The kings of Israel were not to be motivated by selfish ambition or the desire for wealth. They were not to take advantage of the people for their own aggrandizement. And they were to live and rule according to the just and holy statutes and precepts of the Law of God. As they read and studied it day by day, the Law of God would keep the hearts of Israel’s kings humble, so that they could serve the people well.

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The kings Israel was to know in the land of promise would thus be regents of God, obedient to His Law, and devoted to serving His people for the fullness of covenant blessings. They would be descendants of Judah, and would begin a dynasty that would only end with One Whose name is Shiloh—a word, as we have seen, that means something like, “Him Whose It Is.”

Thus, Moses reported to the people of Israel that God had great Kingdom purposes in mind for them, and they must trust Him, enter fully into His promises, live as His Kingdom people according to His Law, and look forward to the day of Shiloh’s coming, when all kingdoms and nations would come under His authority and rule.

It is clear, therefore, that the Kingdom presence was to be considered inextricable from the further development of God’s covenant and the expression and realization of all He promised and commanded His people from the beginning.

A reminder in the wilderness

When, just as the generation born in the wilderness was preparing to enter the land, the report was brought to Moses of the prophecy of the false prophet, Balaam, he must have been encouraged to see how God had impressed on even this pagan the certainty of these regal and covenantal matters.

Balaam acknowledged, quite against his will, that God was King in the midst of His people, and that He would lead and sustain them against every attempt to frustrate His purposes (Num. 23.22-24: note how Balaam’s words echo those of Jacob in Gen. 49.8-11). In language pointedly reminiscent of God’s promise to Abraham, Balaam declared that God’s stated purpose for His people is sure, and all nations would be wise, therefore, to seek His blessing from the kingdom of God’s people (Num. 24.8, 9).

Fortified with the recovered stories of their forebears, observers of destroyed kings and realms, and recipients of promises directly related to kings and a Kingdom where blessing and prosperity were to be known by all, Israel was much encouraged to follow Joshua in the work of conquest.

The kingdom vision Moses received reached back to Israel’s beginnings and forward to the land of promise, then beyond that to a final, coming King. It situated the people of Israel as citizens in a nation ruled by God, but overseen by earthly kings, submitted to God’s Law. It saw the nations as seeking the favor of God by blessing His people or knowing the curse of God by opposing them. And, throughout their journey through the wilderness, God gave His people ample evidence that what He had promised, He was well able to provide.

For reflection

1. What was to be the role of the Law of God in the kingdom God would establish for His people?
2. How would the nations respond as they saw Israel living that way?
3. What “kingdom lessons” are suggested by this first part of our study of the Kingdom presence?

Next steps—Preparation: Review all we have seen thus far about the kingdom idea in the Old Testament. Has this affected your thinking about the Kingdom of God in any ways?

2 Joshua and the Kingdom

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel... This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Joshua 1.1, 2, 8

He delivers

The book of Joshua presents a type of the Kingdom of God. It is a study in realizing the presence, promise, and power of God's ruling Presence in and among His people. We don't actually arrive at the kingdom of Israel in Joshua, but the conquest of Canaan brings together many of the kingdom ideas we have been examining and establishes the first visible presence, if only in prototype, of the realization of God's covenant and dominion on earth.

In many ways, the book of Joshua foreshadows the book of Acts, when God poured out His Spirit and people began entering His promised Kingdom by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As in the book of Acts, so here the people of God begin to lay hold on the promises of God in a particular place under the leadership of a man whose name means "He delivers" and which is the very name the Son of God bore as He delivered His people into the Kingdom and promises of God.

The book of Joshua will give us the first glimpse in time of what the land where God's people exercise dominion looks like as it becomes present in the world. The land of Canaan, rife with wickedness, tribalism, rivalries of nations, and almost unremitting war, would come under the rule of a people saved, called, and sent by God to establish a new presence in that ancient land. Subduing the land of Canaan would be a long process, fraught with struggle, involving all the people of God, and leading to the realization—in a preliminary way—of the promises of God's covenant with Abraham.

Joshua would not become Israel's king. As he would testify at the end of this book, the people were to serve God only. He was their King. His ways must be their ways, or they would fall through the constant temptations presented by the surrounding pagan nations into ways and practices that would invoke His wrath.

As King of His people, God resolved to rule according to His Law and unto His promises. The people would know His Presence among them as they listened to His Word and walked in all His ways. The land of Canaan would become the Kingdom of God in a way that foreshadowed the coming of His eternal Kingdom in the book of Acts and the New Testament.

The book of Joshua helps us focus on the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God, bringing forward all the Old Testament teaching about the Kingdom and helping us gain a clearer vision of its coming on earth as it is in heaven. Like the main characters in a novel, each of these themes is introduced here in chapter 1.

The presence, promise, and power of God's rule

In Joshua 1, the people are poised on the brink of entering the land of promise, where they will establish a new nation unlike any the world has seen before, one that will gain the admiration of all who see it (Deut. 4.5-8).

More important even than this, God is present with His people (v. 5), and He promises them—as He promised Moses (Ex. 33.14)—that His Presence would go with them unto rest and joy (Josh. 1.13-15). By His Presence in their midst, Israel would vanquish her foes, settle the land, and begin seeking the promises of Deuteronomy 28.1-14 through obedience to God's Law.

Those promised blessings, communicated through Moses, set in the minds of God's people a vision of the fullness and rest God would grant His people in the land of promise. God summarized that vision to Joshua in chapter 1 (vv. 3-6): "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall *be able* to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them."

Two-and-a-half tribes had already begun to taste and see that the promises of God were true and good, and they would be an inspiration for the other tribes throughout all the conquest of Canaan.

Finally, God reminded Joshua of the power He had shown in the past, in delivering Israel from Egypt. Now He commanded Joshua to appropriate that power by focusing on His promises and walking in His Law. God would flow His power through Israel, make their way to prosper, and give them success in all things as they walked according to His Word. Israel would know that God had brought them to this place and settled them in His promises by His great delivering power. This power foreshadowed the far greater power that the people of God would receive in the book of Acts when the Spirit came down upon them, sending them to the far corners of the world with the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

A foretaste

Joshua was not a perfect man or leader. By the end of the book of Joshua, much remained to be done in bringing the dominion of God to the land of promise. As we move into the book of Judges, we can see the fabric of Israel beginning to unravel as focus on the promises and obedience to the Law degenerated into a tribal free-for-all of "I, me, mine."

But in the book of Joshua we see both a framework for thinking about the coming Kingdom of God—its presence, promise, and power—and are reminded of the key to realizing that divine Presence and dominion—faith and obedience.

Joshua gives us a foretaste of the Kingdom that the greater Joshua—Jesus— would usher in by His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and reign. And though Joshua died before the kingdom presence could be fully realized, Jesus ever lives to advance His reign of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the prototype that Israel realized in the book of Joshua.

For reflection

1. Can you think of some ways that the book of Joshua and the book of Acts are alike?
2. How can understanding the conquest of Canaan under Joshua help us in seeking the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed and inaugurated?
3. How do we see God's covenant and His Law coming together in the book of Joshua?

Next steps—Preparation: Read the book of Joshua at a single sitting. Make notes reflecting on the way Joshua brings forward the Old Testament teaching on the Kingdom we have seen thus far and how it points to the greater Joshua and His Kingdom yet to come.

3 David: Gift from God

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son...And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever...” 2 Samuel 7.12-14, 16

From the beginning

It’s clear that ideas about dominion, kings, and a kingdom—even of a coming mysterious “Him-Whose-It-Is” King—were in the minds of God’s covenant people from the very beginning.

Adam and Eve understood that they were to exercise dominion over all the creation. Abraham was promised that kings would descend from him, and he had at least one experience with a King of Righteousness and Peace to lead him to hope that such might be the monarchs who would be part of his legacy. His grandson, Jacob, prophesied of a coming kingdom for the people of Israel, and of a dynasty of kings, issuing from the tribe of Judah, that would continue until Shiloh appeared to rule all peoples. Moses further prepared the minds and hearts of the people of Israel for a king and kingdom by explaining that God would give them a king, and he would rule them according to His Law and for their good. And Joshua gave the people a time-and-place foretaste of the kind of Kingdom presence that could be realized on earth.

As we work our way through the Old Testament, we can feel the momentum for and anticipation of a kingdom and kings building within the ranks of the people of God. Though certain tribes jumped the gun by wrongly naming Abimelech their king (Jdgs. 9.1-6), and though the people of Israel looked to the wrong tribe for the first king of *all* Israel – Benjamin instead of Judah – still, it’s hard to miss the fact that Israel expected a king and longed to be a kingdom, for this is what they understood the Lord had promised.

The Kingdom presence had been established in their minds, and, throughout the rest of the Old Testament, the people of God would work to make that kingdom a reality. They would only ever realize partial success, but the vision of the kingdom God intended for them captured their imaginations.

David and the kingdom

With the accession of David to the throne of Israel, the vision of God’s coming Kingdom takes on new clarity and expansiveness.

I think it is safe to say that David’s vision of the Kingdom of God was grounded in the understanding of his forebears. For all his faults, David was a man of God’s Word. Thus, he would have been familiar with the ideas relating to a rule of God, through His people and over all the earth, that previous generations of the people of God had glimpsed and known.

He would also have had the benefit of seeing first-hand the calamitous attempt of King Saul at establishing a rule over Israel on the strength of personality and wits alone. David would have filed that episode under the “how not to” section of his approach to building a kingdom.

But it was God’s direct revelation to David, through the prophet Nathan, that began to precipitate in his mind a clearer and more expansive vision of what God was planning to do, and how (2 Sam. 7). In his response to God’s Word through Nathan, we can discern four general parameters of David’s understanding which, as we shall see, guides all subsequent development of the vision of God’s Kingdom.

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The kingdom as a gift from God

First, David understood that the Kingdom God intended to establish with him would come from God as a gift to His people, as a manifestation of His covenant faithfulness (2 Sam. 7.21, 24, 27). The kingdom would thus be of heavenly and eternal provenance, and it conveyed the intentions of its Giver, for His covenant promises and His eternal purposes and economy.

Second, and as a consequence of the first parameter, this Kingdom would be rooted in and dependent upon eternal verities—truths and conditions existing in and emanating from a realm not of this world (2 Sam. 7.21, 22, 25, 28). David would not be free to rule as he pleased. Rather, as Moses had earlier shown, and as God had instructed Joshua, the Word of God would be the guiding light of David's reign.

Third, God's intention for His Kingdom was that it should come to expression *on earth* and engage all the nations of the world (2 Sam. 7.19, 23). This would come about through the agency of God's King, Who would also be, in some mysterious sense, God's Son (2 Sam. 7.14).

Finally, there was to be continuous and vital interaction between God and the people to whom He would give His Kingdom, so that they might discern His will, know His presence, protection, and provision, and glorify Him in all their Kingdom activities.

And central to this presence of God with His people would be the work of God's king and son (2 Sam. 7.23, 27, 29; cf. Ps. 72).

Now the idea of a king and kingdom began to take real shape. From David on, God's covenant people would, through his example and by his teaching, have a better sense of what to anticipate, what to hope for, and what to seek with respect to His promised King and Kingdom.

We'll want to examine each of these parameters a bit more, looking to the psalms of David to see how his understanding developed as he sought and served the Lord throughout his reign as King of Israel.

For reflection or discussion

1. How do you understand the Kingdom of God? What is it? How do we relate to it?
2. What should we expect to learn about life in the Kingdom from David and other Old Testament examples?
3. In what sense is the Kingdom of God a gift from God? In what sense is it a calling from God?

Next steps—Preparation: Have you mapped out your Personal Mission Field yet? Jesus was sent to “bring near” the Kingdom of God, and we have been sent in just the same way (Jn. 20.21). Watch [this brief video](#), then download the worksheet and map our your sector of the Kingdom of God.

4 David: From Heaven on Earth

*Lift up your heads, O you gates!
And be lifted up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
The LORD mighty in battle. |
Lift up your heads, O you gates!
Lift up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
He is the King of glory. Selah Psalm 24.7-10*

*The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” Psalm 110.1*

The Kingdom is a gift from God

David understood the coming Kingdom of God as an incredible, wondrous, mysterious, and glorious gift from God.

Who was he? And who was his household, that God should seek him out to be king over his people (2 Sam. 7.18)? Granted, God had declared through Jacob that a king and dynasty would descend through Judah to rule all the nations (Gen. 49.8-10), but there was no reason for David to think, growing up in a common household in Bethlehem, that somehow that blessing might descend to him.

The giving of God’s Kingdom to and through David is thus an *act of sovereign grace*. We can see David reflecting on the wonder and implications of this gift in various of his psalms.

God comes to His people, the King of Glory, to enter among them and establish His good and perfect rule in righteousness and peace (Ps. 24). Their duty is to open to Him and submit to His rule, so that His blessings may flourish among them. He Who chose Abraham and graciously redeemed Israel from slavery was now intending to come to them and establish His rule of glory and power in their midst, through a king selected by His own sovereign grace and wisdom (Ps. 144.9-15).

As God had led Israel through the wilderness and the conquest of Canaan, now He would also establish His Presence among them, receive their glory and praise, and continue to subdue the nations to His divine economy through the Kingdom He establishes with His people (Ps. 68). This unfathomable, good, and glorious gift is to be received with praise and thanks by Israel and all the kingdoms of the earth: “Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth;/O sing praises to the Lord...who gives strength and power to *His* people./Blessed be God!” (Ps. 68.32, 35)

This Kingdom is grounded in eternal verities and conditions

David understood the progress of God’s rule and blessings on earth to be the direct result of His rule in heaven, beyond the material plane, where He is seated in glory and power, exercising dominion over all the earth and all creation (Pss. 9.7-20; 10.16-18). God is unchanging; His rule is settled and fixed in heaven. Whatever may be His will there is what He intends to accomplish on earth as well—justice, righteousness, and abundant blessing for those who trust in Him.

God's Kingdom is "an everlasting kingdom" and His dominion "*endures* throughout all generations" (Ps. 145.13). Changing conditions on earth, the indifference or rebelliousness of men, or even the unfaithfulness of His people do not change what God intends to do. His determination will be done on earth, as it is in heaven, for, as an eternal King, He will not suffer the wickedness of men to continue forever before His eyes.

David understood that the Law of God was thus critical for bringing the will of God to pass for the blessing of His people (Ps. 19). The Law of God encodes the mind and will of God. Only by reading, meditating on, studying, and obeying the Law of God could God's people obtain all that He had promised them and all that He was resolved to do by bringing His eternal reign to bear on earth as it is in heaven. The prayer of God's people should thus ever be, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart/Be acceptable in your sight,/O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19.14).

The Kingdom is to have earthly expression

The rule of God, which David saw, was to be extended beyond Israel as a blessing for all mankind (2 Sam. 7.19). Centered on God's rule from within the midst of His people (Ps. 24), the Kingdom God was establishing called for the subjection of all nations to the holy and righteous and good purposes of God (Ps. 2). God rules over and judges all the nations; those that submit to Him know true blessing and happiness (Pss. 9.7, 8; 33.10-12).

The King of this expansive reign is regarded as the Son of God (Ps. 2). He rules over the nations at the right hand of God, subduing His enemies and advancing His reign, through His obedient people, like the refreshing dew of the morning (Ps. 110). All creation comes under the rule of God and His King (Ps. 29), and wherever the rule of God spreads on earth, it brings prosperity, justice, and peace to the nations (Ps. 72).

David got it. The promised kingdom had come with him, at least, in some form. But there was more to come, a Kingdom that would extend to all the earth and all creation, and a King, seated at the right hand of God, Who would advance that Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Thus, the people of God should ever pray, "Give the king Your judgments, O God,/And Your righteousness to the king's Son." (Ps. 72.1)

For reflection or discussion

1. "On earth, as it is in heaven..." How does the rule of King Jesus operate in heaven? How do heavenly beings respond to His rule?
2. From Psalm 24, how did David see the impact of God's rule on His own people?
3. From Psalm 110, what would be the impact of God's rule on the nations?

Next steps—Preparation: Use Psalms 24 and 100 to pray from the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

5 David: The Coming King

*Give the king Your judgments, O God,
And Your righteousness to the king's Son...
He shall have dominion also from sea to sea...
And blessed be His glorious name forever!
And let the whole earth be filled with His glory.* Psalm 72.1, 8, 19

*All the ends of the world
Shall remember and turn to the LORD,
And all the families of the nations
Shall worship before You.
For the kingdom is the LORD's,
And He rules over the nations.* Psalm 22.27, 28

Heaven and earth

The psalms of David testify to the nature, importance, and power available through the communion God enjoys with and among His people. David understood that communion—that fellowship—in terms of a kingdom, and especially of a coming King and the Kingdom He would bring into the world.

As we read through these various psalms of David, we see that God speaks to His people and guides them in His way. They cry out to Him, and He hears and delivers them. He offers them precious and magnificent promises. They pursue those blessings by resolving to obey His Word. He delivers them from their enemies and hears their cries for renewal when they have drifted from Him. He spreads a banquet table for His people, in the very presence of their enemies, so that, as they feast with Him, none shall make them afraid, and none shall thwart the purposes of His divine economy.

All these blessings rest especially, and ultimately, with the King Whom God has chosen to set over His people (Pss. 2, 110). As the people love and serve their anointed King, they go forth and proclaim His rule and bring the blessings of it to all the nations of the earth.

And nowhere is the grand, all-ruling, eternal plan more fully developed than in Psalms 72 and 22, David's prayers for God's King and His Kingdom.

Solomon and beyond

While Psalm 72 is, first, a prayer for Solomon, who inherited David's kingdom and led it to its greatest heights of glory, it is more than that. It's not difficult to see that, in Psalm 72, David is seeing beyond Solomon down the far stretches of history, to the unfolding of a Kingdom under a King Who is God's own Son, and Whose rule will bring blessing to the whole earth.

Let's take a quick look through this glorious psalm.

David foresees the King and Son of God ruling according to His Law, bringing righteousness and justice to even the poorest and oppressed (vv. 1-4). His Kingdom is without end; He will rule as long as time continues (v. 5; cf. Is. 9.6, 7), and His reign will bring blessing like the dew and refreshment like a spring shower to all the earth (vv. 6, 7). Under His rule righteousness and peace will flourish (v. 7; cf. Rom. 14.17, 18). His enemies will fall at His feet and people from every nation will come to praise, honor, and serve Him (vv. 8-11). He will shepherd the poor, deliver the oppressed, and save the souls of the needy (vv. 12-14). He will live and reign continuously, and the wealth of nations will flow to Him, along with the praise and prayers of the peoples of the world (v. 15). The creation itself will blossom and bear abundant fruit, and those who dwell in

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cities will prosper with those who dwell in the countryside (v. 16). His Kingdom, once established, will endure forever, and all peoples are called to bless and praise His holy name (vv. 17-19).

Psalms 22 echoes these themes, except here we have the suffering Servant Himself, reflecting from within His suffering, on the promise of the Kingdom His suffering would achieve. Praise shall arise to God from His work (Ps. 22:25). The poor and those who seek the Lord will be satisfied (v. 26). People from all over the world will turn to the Lord and worship Him within His Kingdom (vv. 27, 28). God will make sure that, generation after generation, the righteousness of His King and Kingdom will be recounted and embraced (vv. 30, 31).

Thus the coming of the Kingdom with increasing fullness depends on the work of God's Servant in bringing the power of heaven to bear on earth. He is the King for Whom this great Kingdom is intended, a Kingdom that will bring righteousness, peace, and joy to the world, mirroring the reality of God's rule in heaven.

A framework for future development

Psalms 72 and 22 represent David's clearest insight to the coming King and Kingdom of God. He brings forward all the thinking and hopes of the people of Israel and expands them into a horizon that reaches to the end of time and beyond.

These glorious psalms teach us, as they have taught God's people for generations, to think, pray, and work for the promised Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33).

David, like no one else before him, established a framework for thinking about the nature and purpose of God's Kingdom, and for setting the hearts of God's people to seek that Kingdom as their highest priority. The prominence of the Kingdom in David's prayers makes for a Kingdom presence in the Old Testament that we must not ignore or minimize.

As we turn next to the prophets, then to the Lord Jesus and the apostles, we shall see, with increasing clarity, how the outline of the Kingdom which David described, becomes fuller and more complete as the history of God's redemptive work continues.

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you describe the *character* of the Kingdom David foresaw in Psalms 72 and 22?
2. Peace is the overall *condition* the Kingdom brings to those it reaches. How does David describe that peace in these psalms?
3. Joy is the *consequence* of the Kingdom's coming. How should God's Kingdom people express the joy they have in Him?

Next steps—Preparation: Meditate on Matthew 6:33. As you think about seeking the Kingdom as the highest priority of your life, how does David's vision in Psalms 72 and 22 inform your prayers, planning, and practice?

6 The Prophets: Gathering Storm

*“Then the kingdom and the dominion,
And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,
Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.” Daniel 7.27*

*And again the word of the LORD came to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying, “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying:
I will shake heaven and earth.
I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms;
I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms.
I will overthrow the chariots
And those who ride in them;
The horses and their riders shall come down,
Every one by the sword of his brother. Haggai 2.20-22*

The folly of kings

It may have been that David and Solomon set the bar of expectations so high in ancient Israel that the very greatness of their success bred the disasters of Israel and Judah in the generations that followed.

Certainly, one of the main lessons to be derived from the monarchic period of Israel’s history is that the Kingdom God intends to establish, and over which He will rule, cannot be defined by the parameters and protocols of a merely earthly realm. While Israel achieved an almost unprecedented measure of greatness, splendor, and prosperity under David and Solomon, subsequent rulers, for a variety of reasons, failed to realize the same height of success. And internecine fights, fueled by idolatry and the lust for power, hastened the ultimate disintegration and destruction of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of the people of Israel.

All this was very discouraging to the Israelites and their rulers. They had come to understand through the patriarchs and Moses that God was planning a great and expansive kingdom in which His people would know His blessings and extend them to all nations and peoples. For nearly a century, under David and Solomon, their hopes must have soared as they participated in the wealth, power, safety, and prestige of the Davidic Kingdom.

But their folly was in thinking primarily in temporal and material terms. As Daniel foresaw, the Kingdom God would give to His saints would come to them from heaven via the auspices of the Son of Man as an eternal and unshakeable Kingdom. Had they looked as hard for this Kingdom as they fought and connived for their earthly ones, the kings of Israel and Judah might have realized more of the promised blessings of God.

The prophets in the kingdom

But as their kingdoms began to unravel, Israel’s hopes of realizing all that God had promised must have begun to dwindle.

Into that situation, as the folly of human rulers tore to shreds the kingdom fabric of the nation, the prophets of God began to point His people to larger horizons, grander vistas, and even more expansive promises of Kingdom realization. They seemed to say to the people of Israel and Judah, “Not here. Not this king. Not these vain, material hopes. But there, farther along, in a coming day, under an eternal King—there is where the blessing will be known!”

While we cannot look in detail at the many specific insights given the various prophets concerning the promised coming of the Kingdom of God, I want us to consider, in this installment and the next, five aspects of their collective vision which fueled the hopes of the faithful and laid the groundwork for the greatest events the history of humankind would ever know.

The prophetic vision of the coming Kingdom of God grows like a gathering storm—a storm of drenching grace and glory—throughout the prophetic literature, leaving the Old Testament to close, at least for the faithful, with a powerful expectation of the soon and sudden appearing of a glorious, divine intervention in the affairs of men and nations: the coming of God’s Kingdom, and of His promised King.

God’s authority

First, the prophets reminded the people that it is vain to hope in earthly kings, or to consider that a mere earthly kingdom could contain all that God has promised for His people. The vision of the prophets is one in which, first, the faithful of Israel are reassured that God Himself is King. He rules from His throne in heaven, and His power extends to all nations and peoples. In Haggai’s prophecy, God clears the decks of the world by making the kingdoms of the world submit to His rule and power. In Daniel’s vision, the Ancient of Days presents the Son of Man with a Kingdom, and He, in turn, hands it over to the saints of the Most High God. And though they are tormented, opposed, and oppressed as they struggle to realize this great gift and calling, in the end, the saints prevail, as all kingdoms and authorities of men come under the power and authority of the Most High God.

Such a vision would have been necessary in view of the continuing ravages and losses Israel and Judah experienced at the hands of repressive and violent regimes. It might have appeared to many that God was not as powerful as these earthly kings and their gods, for He seemed unable to defend Israel or Judah against their attacks (Habakkuk). Indeed, even His temple, the very dwelling-place of God on earth, was destroyed and plundered by Nebuchadnezzar in a deliberate attempt to vaunt his own majesty and might over the God of Israel (2 Chronicles, Daniel).

But prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Amos, Habakkuk, Nahum, and more made it clear to all the faithful that the sins of the nations—particularly those committed against the people of God—did not escape the notice of their God. In His way and time, the prophets proclaimed, God would reassert His authority and power over all the nations of the region, and all the peoples of the earth, to demonstrate His justice and might and to validate His claim of sole allegiance and exclusive worship.

Thus, the first point in the message of the prophets was a call to faith, a summons to Israel to focus their hopes beyond this world into the heavenly realm, where even in their day God was preparing events that would turn the world upside down in time. It’s a message we need to hear again in our day.

For reflection or discussion

1. What is a prophet? What is the role of prophets in the Old Testament? Are there prophets in the Church yet today (Eph. 4.11)?
2. Jesus taught us to pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven. What expectations does such a prayer hold out for you?
3. What does it mean for you to “seek” the Kingdom and righteousness of God? How will you do so today?

Next steps—Preparation: Meditate on the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6.9-13), especially as He commands us to pray for the coming of God’s Kingdom. What does the coming of the Kingdom look like in your life? In your Personal Mission Field?

7 The Prophets: The King and His Kingdom

*For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.* Isaiah 9.6, 7

*“Then the kingdom and the dominion,
And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,
Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”* Daniel 7.27

The faithfulness of God

As the promises of Abraham slipped through the fingers of God’s wayward people, even the faithful among them must have wondered if God had changed His mind, and His covenant was no longer valid. Had the people of God at last and finally forfeited their privileges, and the promise of a kingdom, through their unbelief and disobedience?

The second major point in the message of the prophets relates to the faithfulness of God. As the prophets continued to preach and write during this period, they made it abundantly clear that, central to the coming renewal of God’s rule over the nations was a revitalizing of His covenant relationship with His chosen people. A day was coming—as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Zechariah foretold—when God would make a new and lasting covenant with His people, would send a new King and Shepherd to rule and keep them, and would once again extend His blessings through His people to the Gentiles, even to the extent of *including* the Gentiles among the chosen people of God (Hosea, Amos).

All this would be a continuation of God’s gracious way of relating to His people. They had done nothing in the past to cause Him to set His favor upon them. In the present, the time of the Old Testament, they were busy forfeiting that favor as many ways as they could. But though they were faithless, God was faithful, and He would not allow His promises to fall to the ground. Instead, the promises to Abraham would be renewed and expanded beyond anything God had ever declared before in a new Kingdom of grace and glory.

And through the work of an eternal King and descendant from David.

From heaven to earth

How could this possibly be? That must have been the question on the minds of many. How could anyone exceed the achievements of Solomon? And yet we know what happened to him and his kingdom after him (1 Kgs. 11).

This introduces the third primary point in the message of the prophets. What Isaiah and Daniel helped the people of Israel to understand was that events in heaven were transpiring, and would transpire, which would

bring to earth a King, sent from heaven, the very Son of the Most High, Who would inherit the throne of David, bring in the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, and extend the favor of God to all who submitted to Him.

A mere earthly kingdom could not fulfill all that God was promising. It would take an action of *heavenly provenance and character*, bringing divine authority and power in a *new* way to earth, so that the blessings of God might flow to and through His people in the days that were coming.

And that great coming event was somehow bound up with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God upon the peoples of the earth (Ezekiel, Joel). In the Spirit of God heaven would come to earth with power to transform the souls of men (Ezek. 36.26, 27) and to further the Kingdom and glory of God. The promise of the Spirit is the fourth aspect of the message of the prophets. His coming would bring the Kingdom of heaven to earth and begin the restoration of all things to God.

A divine King

Finally, the prophets insisted that all this hope and promise would be accomplished by the coming of One Who is the Son of Man, and yet a descendant of David; the offspring of the Ancient of Days, for Whom the Kingdom was being prepared, and yet the Lord of David, of all the people of God, and all nations. He would come to suffer and die but to rise again (Is. 53), in the process gaining a Kingdom which He would bestow upon His faithful ones to seek, attain, enjoy, and expand unto all the nations of the earth (Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah, Micah).

The faithful in Israel, upon hearing these promises and reading these visions, might have been put in mind of the promised “Seed of the woman” who would destroy the enemy of men’s souls (Gen 3.15), of the Shiloh Who was to come and for Whom the Kingdom was being prepared (Gen. 49.8-11), or of the Prophet and King foretold by Moses and Whom Nathan had revealed to David. Thus the ancient vision of a coming Kingdom would have been renewed and enlarged in these more precise promises of a King to come.

Whether it was to seek revival and renewal in the midst of decay (2 Chronicles), work for prosperity and fruitfulness while in captivity (Jeremiah), or build a humble and unadorned temple in anticipation of a greater temple to come (Haggai), the people of God were to be diligent and faithful, and to focus on the promised Kingdom, doing whatever the present required in order to prepare for it.

So the Old Testament closes with this gathering storm of divine blessing, growing on the horizon of the future. All this would break into human experience with the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and God and the King of Israel and the nations. It is to His vision of the Kingdom of God that we shall next turn our attention.

For reflection or discussion

1. How did the vision of the prophets enlarge and clarify David’s vision of the coming Kingdom?
2. What do we learn from the prophets about the relationship between the coming Kingdom and the promise of God’s Spirit?
3. Summarize the five aspects of the message of the prophets concerning the coming Kingdom.

Next steps—Transformation: How can believers encourage one another in seeking the Kingdom in their Personal Mission Fields? Whom will you encourage today?

Kingdom Presence in the Old Testament (2)

For reflection or discussion

1. With the prophets, the focus shifts from an earthly to a heavenly Kingdom. Explain.
2. How do the prophets portray Shiloh, the One for Whom the Kingdom was prepared?
3. The Holy Spirit comes more into focus in the prophets. In what way?
4. According to the prophets, what will be the role of God's people in receiving the Kingdom?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study of the Kingdom presence in the Old Testament?

For prayer:

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Thank you.

