

THE KINGDOM OF GOD:
TRACING THE DIVINE PROGRAM THROUGH GOD'S REVELATION

Jacob Patrick Heaton
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Introduction

A synthetic overview of the Bible should be both viable and comprehensive. In being viable, it should fit appropriately with the scheme of the biblical text. A synthetic overview of the Bible being comprehensive must have as its range, the entire scope of biblical content and allow for the details of the Bible to fall under the canopy of the adopted overview.

The overview that will be elaborated in this paper is a focus on the Kingdom of God which ties all of the Bible and history together. Renald Showers, a dispensational author, emphasizes this point when he says, “The Kingdom of God concept is the heart of the biblical philosophy of history and, therefore, is the central theme of the Bible.”¹ The utilization of this synthetic overview will be shown to be both viable as a legitimate course of overview and comprehensive in that it covers all of Scripture and history. This paper will define what the Kingdom of God is, according to how it is used in biblical writing. This paper will focus on the office of “theocratic administrator” and its outworking in the chronology of the Scriptures.² This paper will also look at key individuals that God used to bring about His ultimate Theocratic administrator, in the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

1 – EDEN

The Kingdom of God is simply defined by Paul Benware as “the rule of the sovereign God over His creation.”³ Within this definition exists two aspects of God’s sovereign rule over His creation. The first aspect is called the “Universal Kingdom of God” and is the DIRECT reign of God over His creation. The right for God’s rule comes from His identity as creator of the

¹ Showers, *There Really Is A Difference*, 156

² Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 23-24

³ Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 186

universe (Gen. 1:1; Ps.90:2; Acts 17:24). God creating everything from nothing evidences His distinction from creation. It also proves His unlimited power and sovereignty over creation.

Therefore, He is the sovereign of the universe.

The earth is obviously a part of the created universe and is connected to God's domain of sovereignty. However, God reveals in Scripture His intention of having man administer His rule on the earth, and so we see the second aspect as the INDIRECT rule of God over His creation. Upon creating the heavens and the earth, God creates man in His own image, and sets dominion upon man to subdue the earth and have dominion over all life (cf. Genesis 1:26-28). This is the introduction of the theocratic administration of God. The theocratic administration of God is also called the "Mediatorial Kingdom".⁴ Because it is the rule of God on earth through a human representative or mediator. This indirect rule of God begins in God's revelation with Adam, and has various administrators throughout the biblical narrative, and is culminated, redeemed, and fulfilled by Jesus Christ the God-Man.

An important event occurs in the Scripture narrative that disrupts the office of Theocratic administrator. The first theocratic administrator heeded the voice of the serpent and disobeyed God. The result was sin. Mankind was fallen, earth was fallen, and the administrative office was removed from Adam. After the fall of Genesis 3 we see that Satan is shown to have the dominion of the earth (cf. Lk. 4:5-8; Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 5:19). The earth's government changed from a Theocracy to a satanocracy.⁵ The storyline of Scripture then appears to be how the lost administration is restored through the Messianic Kingdom.⁶

⁴ Couch, *An Introduction To Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 292-293

⁵ Showers, *What On Earth Is God Doing*, 15-16

⁶ Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 9

Following Adam, the next theocratic administrator we see in Scripture is Moses. Through Moses we see the first leader of the nation God created from Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). It is also through Moses that God delivered the law which functioned as a national constitution for the infant nation. Moses' successor was Joshua who led the people into the land God promised Abraham's descendants (cf. Gen. 12:1). After Joshua, God developed the role of theocratic administrator to function in the form exercised by the judges of Israel, and later the Kings. The list of theocratic administrators could include Abraham and Noah but it seems that these men and perhaps others do not quite take on the administrative role, but are nonetheless key elements to God's Theocratic administration. The office of Theocratic Administrator was suspended when Israel experienced divine discipline and went off to Babylonian captivity. The suspension was a result of no sitting king of Israel exercising the administrative office. While the various administrators are from different times and are used in different ways, it is apparent that God is working through them to a specific end. The specific end is shown to be the Kingdom of the earth brought back under His control as He reigns through the God-Man Jesus from Jerusalem (Heb. 1:13, 2:6-9). The restoration of the theocratic administration is necessary to the Universal kingdom of God because "He (God) must be triumphant in the same arena where He was seemingly defeated".⁷

2 – THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

As mentioned in the previous section Abraham was not a theocratic administrator. But without Abraham there would be no restored theocracy. Abraham was chosen by God to be a father of a nation. A nation that is later seen to be holy unto the Lord and called to live as such. It

⁷ Ryrie, Basic Theology, 511

is important to note that Abraham did not receive this call from his own merit but simply the grace of God in choosing. The call of Abraham appears in Genesis 12. An important contextual observation should be made in that chapter 11 comes before 12. The significance of this observation is that Genesis 11 reveals the first united system government at Babel which resembled more of a satanocracy than a theocracy. Evidence for this is shown by the people disobeying the divine call to Noah for multiplying and filling the earth (cf. Genesis 9:1; 11:4). The nations of the world are united, but not in following God and worshipping Him. So instead of using an existing nation, God creates a new one. The creation of the nation of Israel begins with promises made to Abraham. God promised Abraham land (Gen. 12:1). He promised to make Abraham a great nation (Gen. 12:2a). He also promised to bless Abraham (Gen. 12:2), and that all the families of the earth will be blessed in Abraham (Gen. 12:3). The significance of God's promises to Abraham are seen in the anticipation of God working in a chosen, created nation, and using that nation to restore the office of theocratic administrator. It is noteworthy that the next individual to hold the office of theocratic administrator is Moses, and he is the human author of the book of Genesis. It then is shown that Abraham and the promises made to him are a key element for what God will use to restore the theocracy, namely the Messianic Kingdom.

As powerful as a divine promise is, God does not leave it there. He enters into a covenant with Abraham. Covenants in the ancient world were common practice. There were different types of covenants that were usually made and they all carry a significant bond to the parties involved. The Abrahamic covenant is what is called a "Royal Grant" covenant.⁸ A royal grant covenant is when a superior, usually a king, makes a promise to an inferior. The promise is considered unconditional, meaning that no conditions are required by the receiver to acquire the

⁸ Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 25

promise, it is instead given out of the benevolence of the superior. The covenant with Abraham being an unconditional, royal grant covenant, can be evidenced by a brief exposition of the passage. When the Bible reader comes to Genesis 15 they observe Abraham concerned with receiving the promises of God. He says “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” (Gen. 15:2). God assures Abraham of His promise and also declares that Abraham’s heir will come from his own body. (Gen. 15:4). Abraham still concerned with the unlikeliness that he and his wife would produce a son, asks God for confirmation (cf. Gen. 15:8). The confirmation comes in the form of the covenant. The passage reveals God having Abraham bring sacrificial animals and having them cut in two. This follows the pattern of ancient covenants known as “cutting a covenant”. Where the parties of the covenant will walk between the severed animals and it signified that if they fail in their conditions they are to be severed as the animals were.⁹ What takes place next evidences the unconditional nature of this covenant. Verse 12 reveals that a deep sleep fell upon Abram. While Abram is in the deep sleep, a smoking oven and a burning torch pass between the pieces (Gen. 15:17). The oven and the torch most likely represent God as He and Abraham are the only qualifying parties to pass through the pieces. Since Abraham is in the divine induced sleep, and only God passes through the severed animals, it should be concluded that the covenant falls on God alone for fulfillment. It is unconditional.

There are three “sub-covenants” that are revealed later in Scripture that provide additional details to the unconditional covenant made with Abraham and His descendants. The first sub-covenant is the “land covenant”. The land covenant is found in Deut. 29-30. The land covenant has seven developments.¹⁰ 1) Dispersion for disobedience (cf. Deut. 30:1). 2) The

⁹ Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 17

¹⁰ LaHaye and Ice, *Charting the End Times*, 80

future repentance of Israel while in dispersion (Deut. 30:2). 3) The Messiah will gather the remaining exiles and transport them to the land (Deut. 30:3-6). 4) The land will be permanently restored to Israel (Deut. 30:5). 5) The whole nation will be converted to their Messiah (Deut. 30:6). 6) judgment to those that oppose Israel (Deut. 30:7). And 7) Israel will experience national blessing and prosperity. In summary, the land is given to Israel, but dwelling in the land and having God's protection and provision is conditioned on obedience to Him. The second sub-covenant is given during the reign of King David. God promises David in 2 Samuel 7, that his house will be the one to deliver the Messiah. In this way the Messiah would be the Son of Abraham and the Son of David (cf. Mt. 1:1). The third sub-covenant is called the "New Covenant". The New Covenant is mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31-37. The New Covenant captures the "blessing" portion of the Abrahamic covenant and finds fulfillment in Israel being regenerated and receiving spiritual blessing in preparation for the Messianic Kingdom. These three sub-covenants find their ultimate fulfillment through the provision of the God-Man Jesus Christ. Although it is important to maintain that many of the blessings of these covenants have been provided but many of them have not yet been realized. The Abrahamic covenant remains unfulfilled, until Israel dwells in the promised land (Land covenant), they have the Son of David reigning over them (Davidic Covenant), and they have been spiritually regenerated (New Covenant).

3 – MOSAIC COVENANT

The Mosaic Covenant is another type of ancient covenant and is called a "Suzerain-Vassal Treaty".¹¹ Dr. Andy Woods gives additional definition to this covenant by adding: "Here

¹¹ Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 25

the suzerain, or a superior, enters into an agreement with an inferior, or a vassal. The vassal promises to come under the protective custody of the suzerain. The suzerain, in turn, promises to bless or curse the vassal depending upon whether the vassal demonstrates loyalty or disloyalty to the suzerain by either obeying or disobeying the specific terms of the covenant text.”¹² God entered into this covenant when the nation of Israel was in its infancy. The descendants of Abraham were allowed to grow and prosper in Egypt until a change of Egyptian dynasty brought them into persecution and slavery. The scenario was created where Israel was a large united body of people, and they needed to be introduced to the God covenanted to them. Therefore, God raised up the office of Theocratic administrator and called Moses to fill that role. Using Moses, God miraculously defended His covenant people and led them out of Egyptian bondage. Following the introduction of God to the people of Israel, the Lord then, transformed them into a nation that has a constitution. The nation Israel’s constitution is the law that was given them on Mount Sinai. (Ex. 19-24). The forming nation having an administrator, now only needed its promised land. As Israel approached the land they waned in their faith in God and as a result God caused them to wonder in the wilderness for 40 years. As the unbelieving generation died away, the new generation enters the land but not until they have been taught the law again. The book of Deuteronomy literally means “2nd Law”. The law is given to this new generation so that they understand their responsibility as they go and inhabit the promised land given to them in the unconditional promise to their father Abraham. However, what we see in the book of Deuteronomy is conditions placed on Israel, determining whether or not a particular generation will continue to be blessed by the Lord in the land, or if they would experience divine discipline and potentially be kicked out of the land (cf. Deut. 28; Lev. 26). Dr. Andy Woods gives a helpful

¹² Ibid.

explanation of the relationship between the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant and the conditional Mosaic Covenant. He says, “Due to the Abrahamic Covenant’s unconditional nature, no amount of disobedience on Israel’s part can remove her ownership of these blessing. While Israel can be severely disciplined by God for disobeying the terms of the Mosaic Covenant (Lev. 26:14-46; Deut. 28:15-68), even resulting in the nation’s conquest by foreign powers (Deut. 28:49-50), she can never forfeit ownership of the promises spoken of in the Abrahamic Covenant. However, before Israel can possess or enjoy what she owns, she must obey the terms of the Mosaic Covenant”.¹³ This is a remarkable distinction between Israel owning the land by God’s divine grant, and possessing it, with His favor. When the God-Man Jesus Christ comes again, He will establish His kingdom in the land of Israel, and there they will experience the fullness of God’s favor that is under the Abrahamic covenant.

4 – THE THEOCRACY’S DEPARTURE

The theocratic administrative role deactivates when Israel goes into Babylonian Captivity. This is the result of there being no theocratic administrator in Israel to represent God’s theocracy. All that remain are Gentile nations and Gentile rulers. This period is mentioned in the book of Luke and is called the “times of the Gentiles” (cf. Lk. 21:24). Though Luke mentions this period in his gospel account, the actual time-frame comes from two parallel prophecies in the Book of Daniel. The first prophecy is in Daniel chapter 2. The context is the beginning of the Babylonian captivity, where a young man named Daniel and his three friends are highlighted, and Daniel begins his prophetic career. The scenario is that King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream in which none of his “wise men” can interpret or even tell what it was, for the King kept the dream from

¹³ Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 25

them. Daniel receives insight from God and he not only describes the dream, but goes on to interpret it. The dream involves a statue with layers made of different substances. As Daniel interprets the unknown dream to the King, he describes the statue's layers. The head is gold, the chest and arms silver, the mid-section is bronze, the legs are iron, while the feet are a mixture of clay and iron (cf. Dan. 2:31-33). By this count there are five layers. Daniel then describes a "stone . . . cut without hands" that strikes the statue at its feet of iron and clay (v. 34). Then all five layers are crushed by the stone and carried away by the wind (v. 35). The stone is said to become "a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (v. 35). After telling the dream, Daniel then interprets it for the king (v. 36). Daniel interprets the head of gold as the Babylonian kingdom and Nebuchadnezzar its Gentile king (vv. 37-38). Daniel declares "after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours" (v. 39). Then a description is provided for the third sequential kingdom and is designated as "a third kingdom of bronze" (v. 39). The fourth kingdom is strong like iron and will break and crush all others (v. 40). The fifth kingdom is a mixing of the fourth kingdom represented by the iron and the clay (v. 41). An interesting description is given in verse 43 where it says "they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another". The impression, is that this final kingdom will exist but not be phased out or crushed, until the stone cut without hands. The stone is interpreted as a kingdom set up by "the God of heaven" and this kingdom will never be destroyed and will destroy all others (vv. 44-45).

Later in the book of Daniel, Chapter 7 Daniel is the one who has a dream and vision. The dream is of a great sea stirred up and a series of four beasts come up from the sea. The first is like a lion, but takes on eagle wings. The second is like a bear. The third is like a leopard, having four wings of a bird and four heads. The fourth beast is described as "dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong". It has iron teeth, and ten horns. As Daniel was seeing the horns

there was another horn different than the others and had “eyes like a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words” (Dan. 7:1-8). The interpretation is given in the following verses in Daniel 7:15-28. The beasts represent “four kings which arise out of the earth” (v. 17). The fourth however, is referred to as a kingdom, and has 10 kings plus another that is over the 10. Though this vision troubled Daniel, he was comforted by the truth that the “Ancient of Days” comes and the “time came for the saints to possess the kingdom” (v. 22).

To summarize these prophecies, the “times of the Gentiles” is the period of time where the theocratic office is deactivated from the Babylonian captivity, until the Second Coming of Christ. Because of these two prophecies consisting of Gentile nations that give way in sequential order it is not until the sequence runs its course that the kingdom will exist on earth again. This is when the theocracy will not only be reactivated, but it will be ultimately restored. This is because the One filling that office will be the Messiah Jesus Christ. He represents that final kingdom in the sequence. The “stone cut without hands”. This final kingdom will destroy all others. At this time, the “time of the Gentiles” will come to an end, and the Messianic Kingdom will be established on the earth.

5 – OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

The Apostle Peter gives one of the most powerful statements that defends the divine inspiration of Scripture. In 2 Peter 1:19 he draws a contrast with his eyewitness testimony of seeing a glimpse of the King and the glory of His future kingdom, with the “prophetic word”. The New American Standard Bible translates as “we have the prophetic word made more sure”. The idea is the prophetic word is “more sure”, than eyewitness testimony. Even the testimony of

an Apostle. The reason for the prophetic word being greater than eyewitness testimony is that prophecy comes as a result of the human prophet being “moved” (lit. carried) by the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Andy woods provides a list of fourteen descriptions of the kingdom coming directly from the Old Testament.¹⁴ This is only a sample of what the prophets were privileged to reveal in their prophetic ministry. But the reality is they anticipated a future, glorious, earthly kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital and Messiah as its King. Many prophets shared this anticipation despite their not being an active theocratic administrator on the throne. Despite ministering in the period called “times of the Gentiles”. The first description of the kingdom coming from the Old Testament is that it is established by God (cf. Dan. 2:44). The second description is that it is eternal (cf. Dan. 7:27). The third is that Zechariah reveals that the Messiah will rule directly (cf. Zech. 9:9-10). Zechariah, was one of the prophets ministering during the “times of the Gentiles” and the deactivated theocratic administration. Yet, he saw a future hope of an earthly kingdom. The fourth description is that this kingdom will indeed be on this earth (cf. Zech. 14:9). The fifth is the realization of Israel’s land promises (Gen. 15:18-21; Ezek. 47:13-23). The sixth description of the kingdom from the Old Testament prophets is the preeminence of Israel (cf. Isa. 49:22-23). This passage is particularly powerful in light of the understanding of the “times of the Gentiles”. The seventh description of the kingdom is a lengthy discourse on the Millennial Temple (cf. Ezek. 40-46). The eighth is the resurrected David, who is said to be “their king” (cf. Jer. 30:9). Rather than seeing this as a figurative expression of Jesus the Son of David, it is better to maintain that the historical David will have a role in reigning during the future kingdom. The ninth description is the kingdom is epitomized by righteousness. (cf. Isa. 9:6-7). The Tenth description is the limitations of the curse (cf. Isa. 65:20, 22). The duration of life will be

¹⁴ Woods, *Sermon: 2 Peter 07 “A Sure Witness”*, 2 Peter 1:16-21

increased, agricultural curses will be restricted and it will be a time of blessedness. The eleventh is in addition to a time of righteousness it will also be a time of remarkable peace (cf. Isa. 2:4). The twelfth description is the overall prosperity during this time (cf. Amos 9:13-14; Isa. 65:22). The thirteenth are the topographical changes that are described in Ezekiel 47:1-12. The final description of the kingdom reveals that prayer will have an immediate answer (cf. Isa. 65:24).

All of this evidences two crucial points. Number one, this time is future. Despite Gentiles governing the earth. Despite sin and the effects of sin dominating God's creation. Despite many of these prophecies being delivered during a time of declining or deactivated theocratic administration. The fact remains that they all saw a future hope of an earthly kingdom. The second crucial point, is that this kingdom is unlike any kingdom during the times of the Gentiles. The future kingdom is defined by righteousness, peace, and overall blessing to its inhabitants.

6 – KINGDOM OFFER AND REJECTION

The Old Testament prophesied kingdom is offered to Israel evidenced in the gospel accounts. Matthew's gospel is particularly helpful to bridging the Old Testament and the New Testament. The purpose of Matthew's gospel is seen to be closely related to the Jewish nation of Israel, and the Kingdom promised to the Jews in the Old Testament. The overall message of Matthew appears to have three divisions. The offer of the promised Kingdom to Israel, the rejection of the King by Israel, and the reason why the Kingdom did not come though the King had made His appearance and offered His kingdom to Israel.¹⁵

Matthew starts his gospel with provided proof of Jesus' descending from two significant Jewish men: Abraham and David (Mt. 1:1). Abraham and David received promises that

¹⁵ Couch, *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*, pg. 236

pertained to the theocracy of God. Abraham was promised to be the origin of a great nation (Gen. 12:2) and the promise contained land, seed, and overall blessing. To David it was promised by God to establish his throne forever and that his descendants would be the ones seated on the throne that ruled the great nation descended from Abraham (2 Sam. 7:13-14). Jesus is the promised Messiah, and He offered the promised Kingdom to Israel. The proclamation of this coming Kingdom began publically with the preaching of John the Baptist (Mt. 3:2). John was calling the nation of Israel to prepare themselves, for the Kingdom was about to come. The preaching of John was followed by Jesus Himself proclaiming the Immanency of the Kingdom (Mt. 4:17), and the good news of the kingdom (Mt. 4:23). Without the understanding of the kingdom from the Old Testament, a Bible reader can get confused by the reference to the “good news of the kingdom”. The good news of the kingdom has to do with the fulfillment of the prophetically promised kingdom. The good news of personal salvation is different and is based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A particular point of emphasis in the first major division of Matthew’s gospel is directed towards the Kingdom teaching found in chapter 5-7. We identify this discourse as instruction on the Kingdom based on the frequent reference to the Kingdom within these two chapters (Mt. 5:3, 5, 10, 19, 20; 6:10, 13, 33; 7:21). These references to the Kingdom are to be understood in the established context of the Kingdom mentioned in Matthew 4:17 and 4:23. This understanding follows the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic. It is correct, therefore, to see this Kingdom teaching as being a standard for disciples’ lives “for the time preliminary to the establishment of the Kingdom.”¹⁶ This interpretation is alluded to in a comment from Lewis Sperry Chafer, though he did not hold to this interpretation. He says “The conclusion growing

¹⁶ Toussaint, *Behold The King*, pg. 91

out of this analysis of this discourse is that it is the direct and official pronouncement of the King Himself of that manner of life which will be the ground for admission into the Kingdom.¹⁷

The King, having proclaimed the promised Kingdom to Israel, faced opposition that permeated to the majority of the nation of Israel. Jesus first faced opposition from the religious leaders, who influenced the nation of Israel as a whole. Jesus had an encounter with a man with a withered hand whom Jesus healed publically in the synagogue (Mt. 12:9-13). Following this encounter, the religious leaders seeing it occurred on the Sabbath, sought to destroy Jesus. Departing from the synagogue, Jesus healed many who followed after him, causing many to wonder if this indeed was the “Son of David” (Mt. 12:23). But when Jesus healed the blind and mute man who was afflicted by demon possession it led the religious leaders to publically proclaim their rejection of the Messiah. They accused Jesus of utilizing the power of Beelzebub for His miraculous power (Mt. 12:24).

The Jewish leaders plotted against Jesus, and later delivered him to the governor Pilate (Mt. 27:1-2). This handing over was the ultimate rejection of Jesus. Their rejection is verbalized in the tragic declaration of the Jewish people to crucify Jesus, their Messiah (Mt. 17:22, 23, 25). As a result of the rejection of the King they were also rejecting the kingdom that He offered. It is important to note that though the kingdom was rejected it was not done away with. The theocratic administration simply remained deactivated. The Messiah laments over the nations rejection, and also reveals the conditions on which He will return. Matthew 23:37- 39 says “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me*

¹⁷ Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Volumes 5 & 6*, 111 vol. 5

no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'” Following this lamentation, Jesus provides in what is famously called the “Olivet Discourse”, instruction on what will transpire before He returns to establish the kingdom (cf. Mt. 24-25).

7 – INTERIM AGE KINGDOM MYSTERIES

On the same day the religious leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah (Mt. 13:1), Jesus began to teach in parables. A majority of the nation of Israel assumed that their descending from Abraham permitted them automatic entrance into the Kingdom of heaven. Consequently, a growing number resisted the message of Christ on how one would be admitted, and receive the promised Kingdom. Following the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the religious leaders, Jesus begins His parable teaching ministry (Mt. 13:3). The discourse of Matthew chapter thirteen has posed difficulties for interpretation. There are three general approaches to the interpretation of the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 13:11) parables. The first approach is an allegorical approach. The allegorical approach will most often read the Church into the parables meaning. The allegorical view ignores the historical context of first century Israel expecting what was promised to their forefathers, Abraham and David. The second approach is the “new program” of the kingdom approach. The new program view sees the parables as explaining a spiritual form of the kingdom and is determined as being about the church age. The issue with this view is shared with the first view. To see a new program in view is to jump to a figurative approach prematurely and therefore abandons the grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture. The third approach says that these parables reveal new truths about the Old Testament promised Messianic Kingdom.¹⁸ The third view holds most closely to the grammatical-

¹⁸ Couch, *An Introduction To Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 211-213

historical hermeneutic and is, therefore, the most accurate of the three general views. The third view has three key arguments in its favor. The first argument is that it fits well with the term “mystery.” The term mystery carries the meaning of a previously unrevealed truth hidden in the mind of God that is now revealed to Man. (cf. Dan. 2:27-28)¹⁹ The second argument is that this view fits contextually with the usage of “kingdom of Heaven” referenced in Matthew’s gospel. There are twelve occurrences of the word “kingdom,” often paired with “of heaven” in this chapter (Mt. 13:11, 19, 24, 31, 33, 38, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 52). Because there is not included any shift in the definition of this kingdom, it must carry the established definition. In this case, it would be the kingdom proclaimed by John (Mt. 3:2), by Jesus (Mt. 4:17, 23), and by the twelve (Mt. 10:5-7). The “mysteries of the Kingdom” would, therefore, be “the span in which the millennial kingdom is being postponed.”²⁰ This span will be “the experience of the heirs or the sons of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:38).²¹

There are eight kingdom mystery parables. Pastor Jeremy Thomas points out that Jesus spoke in parables to veil truth from the rejecting crowds, and to reveal kingdom truth to the disciples.²² With this observation in mind he later gives an exposition on the mystery kingdom parables, with a helpful summary of each meaning.²³

1- The Parable of the Sower:

Only those who understood the significance of His person and Work would receive new revelation about the Kingdom.

2- The Parable of Wheat and Tares:

¹⁹ Of the popular English translation, the NASB and ESV have the better translation with “mystery”.

²⁰ Toussaint, *Behold The King*, 172

²¹ Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 103

²² Thomas, *Sermon: The Parable of the Sower*, Matthew 13:4-9; 18-23

²³ Thomas, *Sermon: The Kingdom Parables*, Matthew 13:47-52

Sons of the kingdom would grow up alongside sons of the devil during this age before the Son of Man returns in judgment to establish the kingdom.

3- The Parable of the Mustard Seed:

The Sons of the kingdom began very small in number but grew to be a great kingdom for all the nations.

4- The Parable of Leaven:

The sons of the devil would grow up during this age prior to the kingdom's arrival.

5- The Parable of the Treasure:

The incomparable value of the kingdom to one who, not looking, finds it.

6- The Parable of the Merchant:

The incomparable value of the kingdom to the one seeking it.

7- The Parable of the Dragnet:

The Sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one would exist at the end of the age before the kingdom

8- The Parable of the Householder:

The new Scribes would be students of previously revealed kingdom truth in order to communicate these truths to others.

Any suggested interpretation of a parable, is open for further discussion, but the above summary seems to fit best with the parameters of this mysterious age. Dr. Andy Woods gives a exacting statement defining this time. "In sum, when these eight parable are taken together, the Lord reveals the spiritual conditions that will prevail in the world during an interim period when the kingdom is not present."²⁴

²⁴ Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 107

8 – INTERIM AGE CHURCH MYSTERY

During the age described by the mystery kingdom parables, there exists an additional mystery. That is the mystery of the church. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he reveals that Gentiles are fellow heirs, being in Christ through believing the gospel (cf. Eph. 3:3-6). An interesting observation is that Paul also mentions "the dispensation of the grace of God" in verse 2. This is indication that what is taking place with Jew and Gentile being in the same body of Christ, is distinguished from other periods of time. The word "dispensation" literally means stewardship. Paul's ministry was sharing the gospel to Gentiles, and as he tells us here the body of Christ was something unrevealed until God unveiled it to Paul and the Apostles and New Testament prophets (cf. Eph. 3:5 also cf. Col. 1:18, 24-27). This is in line with the biblical definition of mystery (cf. Dan. 2:28-29).

The Church being a mystery is important because it shows Israel was not the Church and the Church is not Israel. Renald Showers proposes seven lines of evidence that shows this distinction between the Church and Israel.²⁵ The first is that Israel is a nation and shown in the Old Testament with political and governmental identity. The Church in contrast is made up of people of different nations and tribes. The second evidence of difference is the nation Israel rejected Christ and the Church received Him. The third evidence is that Israel was the original persecutor of the Church. The fourth is that a Gentile remaining a Gentile is excluded from Israel. A Gentile has equal membership in the Church by trusting in Christ alone. The fifth observation is that Israel in the Old Testament was made up of believers and unbelievers. The Church is made up entirely of believers. The sixth line of evidence is the lack of Scriptural mention of saved Jews in the Old Testament as the "Church of God". Whereas, Scripture calls

²⁵ Showers, *There Really Is A Difference*, 183-186

saved Jews and saved Gentiles in the New Testament the “Church of God” (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32). The final evidence comes from Romans 11. There Paul reveals that the nation Israel is removed from the place of blessing. While Israel is removed from this place of blessing, the Church is seen in its place. This distinction is further developed by the fact that Israel will again occupy that place of blessing in the future (cf. Rom. 11:25-32).²⁶ Another important observation of distinction is that the purpose of Israel was to dwell in the land and be a light to the world. The Church’s purpose is to be a light to the world by going and making disciples (cf. Mt. 28:18-20).

The book of Acts is a transition book that demarcates God’s program with Israel in the Old Testament, with the beginning of the Church. On the day of Pentecost mentioned in Acts 2 the Holy Spirit filled those who were assembled there. This initial gathering was made up of Jews, but later in Acts we see a similar event happen to Samaritans (cf. 8:14-17) and then Gentiles (cf. 10:44-47). Therefore, the beginning of the Church is at Pentecost in Acts 2, since the Church is the body of Christ and being placed in the body of Christ is the ministry of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13). As mentioned above, Israel was taken out of the place of blessing, and the Church was grafted in. Paul is careful to maintain that despite Israel’s casting away, they will be grafted back in, at a future point in time (cf. Rom. 11:25-26). The thing precluding Israel from being grafted back in, is the Church. The Church will be removed from the earth in the event of the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:50-52). The removal of the Church in the rapture will enable Israel to be grafted in and for their final preparation to receive the Messianic kingdom.

In light of the above points, there are three reasons why the Church is not the kingdom. The first reason is that Jesus is not ruling from Jerusalem as the Old Testament describes (Isa.

²⁶ Ibid.

9:6-7). The second is the nation of Israel has not yet trusted Christ as the Old Testament describes (Jer. 31:31-34). Finally, the Church is not the kingdom, because the present description of the earth does not fit the one the Old Testament gives of the kingdom (cf. Amos 9:13-15; Joel 3:18-21; Is. 65:20-25).

9 – THE KINGDOM’S COMING

After the kingdom was offered by Jesus, and rejected by Israel, Jesus gave a condition for them before they would see Him again. He said “you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD.’” (Mt. 23:39) This statement is understood best in light of Old Testament revelation of Israel’s national repentance. The accumulated evidence is too large to ignore, in regards to a future restoration of ethnic Israel, and the restoration of the theocratic administration accomplished by the Messianic kingdom. Dr. Andy Woods highlights this restorative theme from the Old Testament prophets.²⁷ The Major prophets, carrying this title not because of greater significance than the other prophets, but because of a great volume of writing, capture this restorative theme. The prophet Isaiah (Isa. 11:11; 43:5-7; 66:20), the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 30:3, 10-11; 31:8; 32:37), and the prophet Ezekiel (34:13; 39:28) show this theme. The Minor Prophets, despite having shorter writings also carry the hope of restored Israel. The prophet Zechariah (Zech. 10:10), the prophet Amos (Amos 9:14-15), and the prophet Joel (Joel 3:18-21) capture this theme. This mention of restoration is not exhaustive but is sufficient to prove that such a restoration is apparent in Israel’s future.

Another passage that not only alludes to future deliverance but also shows the instrument God uses to bring Israel to that place is Jeremiah 30:7-11. The passage mentions the time of this

²⁷ Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 164-167

event as “that day” (Jer. 30:7a). Further observation notes that the day has to do with the people of Israel evidenced by the description “it is the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7b). The designation of “that day” and the surrounding context evidences that this speaks of the concept known as the “Day of the LORD” (cf. Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; Is. 13:6; Zeph. 1:14). Despite the destruction of the Day of the LORD Jeremiah reveals that Israel will be “saved” (lit. delivered) out of it (Jer. 30:7c). The following verses specify the type of deliverance. It will be a deliverance from physical bondage (Jer. 30:8). There will also be spiritual blessings with a resurrected David as their king (Jer. 30:9). The Lord affirms His loyal love for Israel (v. 10a), reveals that He will restore them from captivity (v. 10b), and they will be divinely protected from enemies (vv. 10c-11).

The “Day of the LORD” is used to speak of a time of destruction, and a time of blessing. Pastor Jeremy Thomas provides a possible explanation to this. “This is a terminology that arose in the ancient near east to refer to a great warrior king who could consummate an entire military campaign in a single day. And thus, the day of the Master, the day of the Lord. So, it refers clearly to military battle.”²⁸ As Scripture is progressively revealed, we start to get a more developed understanding of the Day of the Lord. When the day is speaking of destruction and tribulation it is likely narrowed to the period of time known as the 7-year tribulation or Daniel’s 70th week (Dan. 9:24-27). The tribulation period takes place following the rapture of the Church. Not necessarily immediately after the rapture, but certainly after it. With the Church absent from the earth, God will be accomplishing two things. The first is His divine discipline of the Nation of Israel and bringing them to that place of repentance. The second is the destruction of the unrighteous and ungodly on the earth. The purpose of the tribulation then is to prepare Israel, and

²⁸ Thomas, *Sermon: Joel: a Past Day of the LORD*

to prepare creation for the restored theocracy and the eviction of the satanocracy. This transition takes place by a series of judgments that are depicted in the book of Revelation.²⁹

Following the tribulation, Jesus will return to the earth to establish His kingdom. (Rev. 19:11-16). With Satan in bondage, and the wicked destroyed Jesus will reign in the righteousness described above by the Old Testament Kingdom prophecies. The kingdom is said to be for 1,000 years (cf. Rev. 20:4-6). Following the 1,000 year kingdom there is another important transition. Satan is released and leads a final futile rebellion ending in his ultimate judgment (Rev. 20:7-10). After this, the dead from every age are resurrected to be judged, anyone whose name is not in the book of life is cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15). Following the judgment of the wicked, God creates a new heaven and a new earth. In this domain we are told “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” (Rev. 21:22) The impression is that The Son will co-reign with the Father for all eternity. Thus making the universal kingdom, synonymous with the theocratic kingdom.

Conclusion:

God’s Theocratic Kingdom runs throughout the pages of Scripture and are brought to a culmination in the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Jesus will be the redeemer of mankind, the cursed creation that was impacted by the fall, and the right of dominion over the earth. Jesus accomplished the redemption of mankind by being the satisfying sacrifice on the cross for the sins of man. Jesus will one day bring about the redemption of the cursed earth, which groans for that day (Rom.8:20-22). Finally, Jesus will overthrow Satanic influence and the world system referenced in Scripture in English as the “world” (Jn. 12:31, 14:30, 16:11), and establish the

²⁹ Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, 172

reign of God over the earth. He will rule from the Davidic throne in Jerusalem. The beginning of God's revelation deals with the creation of man and granting of dominion to the first created man. The rest of God's revelation culminates in the overthrow of Satan and is thus seen as the all-inclusive theme of God's Word delivered to Man. The Kingdom of God as a synthetic overview centers around the doxological purpose of God, and that is to glorify Himself. Therefore, a synthetic overview tracing the Kingdom of God concept is both viable and comprehensive.

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