

Sermon 1: The Kingdom of God in Kings and Chronicles

All three synoptic gospels begin with an announcement that the kingdom of God is at hand. This was the first sermon preached by Jesus and by John the Baptist. And in fact, you will find the phrases “kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom of God” almost 100 times in the New Testament. But why?

If you’re anything like me, you grew up reading the Bible every day. Yet every time I arrived at the first chapter of Matthew, I was confused. Where did John and Jesus get this concept of the kingdom of God when the words never appear in the Old Testament?

The short answer is that they got the concept from Israel. As you probably noticed from the scripture reading, tonight is the first sermon on the first book of Kings, where we will be every time I preach on Sunday night for the rest of my time here. And so, it’s important at the outset to know what the books of Kings are. They are a record of history. In fact, they present more than 300 years of records in just under 50,000 words. Just for comparison, *War and Peace* is almost 600,000 words. The longest paper I wrote in college clocked in at 13,000 words. But more than that, the books of Kings are primarily a record of how God dealt with His people in the typological kingdom of Israel. In fact, the reason I am preaching on this passage from 2 Chronicles tonight is because of a single key phrase in verse 8. Here, brothers and sisters, is the Old Testament background to the idea of the Kingdom of God. Here is what Christ was appealing to, what John the Baptist was invoking, what you and I need to understand as we read the Old Testament and the New. *Before the kingdom of God came in the person of Christ, it was expressed by the typological reign of David and his sons over the nation of Israel.*

Now, this doctrine is “in the water” in Reformed communities. If we were go over to Ontario and say such a thing to our Dutch brothers, betraying in the process some of our astonishment, they would pity us in their hearts for being crazy and ask us to have another helping of mashed potatoes. But here, in the United States of America where the stream of genuine Christianity was for some decades nearly coterminous with Dispensational Christianity, we have a different story. What’s going on in Kings and Chronicles? Why all these stories about long dead kings whose careers were, well, ugly--not to say downright sleazy? The reason these things are in the Bible is because they reveal to us truth about our Triune God. Specifically, they are about the progress of His kingdom. Yes, you heard me: the books of Kings and Chronicles are about the kingdom of God.

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- II. Abijah’s Conflict with Jeroboam, vv. 2c-19
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 - C. God Endorses Abijah’s Theology, vv. 13-19
- III. Jeroboam’s Downfall Contrasted with Abijah’s Success, vv. 20-14:1b

- I. The Background: Abijah's Conflict with Jeroboam, 13:1-3**
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Introduction

If there is one thing that the Bible makes abundantly clear, it is that God will not be manipulated. He knows what He wants to do, and He will do it no matter what. Your will must conform to His, and not vice versa. Period. End of discussion. You cannot bully, badger, beg, or bargain God into doing what you want Him to do. He insists on doing everything His own way, and we have no right to demand an explanation from Him.

The passage we have just read relates something astonishing, and, in light of what we know about God, highly disturbing. Here we have a king--so not a religious official, but a secular king--standing up and saying to the world at large, "God is on my side." That's not scary. What's scary is that, according to the rest of the narrative, God *was* on his side! How is it that God fully endorsed the claims of king Abijah of Judah? The answer I hope to show you with God's help is that Abijah was part of the kingdom of God on earth. It's not that God was backing Abijah, but that God was fulfilling His own promises to build His own kingdom. We will be looking at how God made and fulfilled His promises as we go through 1 Kings for the rest of this year, but for now, we need to see the fundamental fact about the Israelite monarchy. That fact is this: the Israelite monarchy was an earthly version of the Kingdom of God. Yes, it was wicked. Yes, it was imperfect. But it was nonetheless a prediction in things of what the Kingdom of God would be.

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Alternative Introduction

You all probably know the content of the first sermon our Lord Jesus Christ preached. It is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and it is very simple: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

Now, most of you know that I was pastoral intern at one of our sister churches in California, and it was there, in June of 2013, that I preached my first sermon. I wanted to imitate the Lord Jesus, so I decided that like His, my first sermon would be on repentance. I wanted to

take the whole text, but I didn't really know what the kingdom of God was, so I decided it was better not to preach on it.

So, I've preached on repentance. But I have been studying the Kingdom of God and praying about it for the last two weeks, and the sermon tonight will describe the kingdom of God. I need to know what it is. You need to know what it is. As we heard in our reading tonight from Matthew 13, and as we sang about in the first hymn, the kingdom of God is an extremely important Biblical theme.

Historical Introduction

The year is 915 B.C. David has been dead and gone for about 55 years. To put it in contemporary terms, the reign of David was as long ago as the Eisenhower administration. The glory days of Solomon are as far in the rearview mirror for these folks as the pre-terrorism, low-gas-price Clinton years are for us. We're into the reign of Solomon's grandson, and times in Judah are not good. If you go back to Kings and read about the hero of our story today, King Abijah, you will basically see that he reigned three years and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God. Basically, Abijah has one thing going for him--not a wave of economic prosperity. Not killer good looks. Not boundless wealth and wisdom like his grandpappy. What he had going for him was God's faithfulness to his promises, and in our text today, he at least had the grace to admit that. Indeed, with God's help I will show you tonight that the kingdom of God found its earthly expression in the Israelite monarchy. The kingdom of God found its earthly expression in the Israelite monarchy. What does that mean? Well, let's dig into our passage.

I. The Background: Abijah's Conflict with Jeroboam, 13:1-3

In the eighteenth year: what year was that? It would be more familiarly known to us as 915 B.C., the year that Abijah began to reign. Notice also how his name differs here: "My Father is Yah" vs. "My father is Yam." Yet the man had a short reign, and pretty much the chief event of his reign was this war against Jeroboam.

Notice also that the number of men fighting on each side is almost exactly the number of men found in the census taken at the end of David's reign (2 Sam 24:9). In case you missed it, the Chronicler wants you to notice that the entire force of both Judah and Israel is here, duking it out. Now, we'll get into Jeroboam's rebellion more in the coming weeks. For now, come with me to the battlefield and listen to this speech that Abijah makes to the warriors of both sides.

II. Abijah Proves that Judah Is the Kingdom of God, 13:4-12

A. First Argument: The History of the Covenant, 13:5-9

Compare 2 Chronicles 9:8; 1 Chronicles 29:23; Isaiah 9:7

So David's line received a gift from God Himself. This was the gift of rule over the 12 tribes of Israel. Notice the covenantal implications of "God of Israel." Now, what is a covenant of salt? Apparently it is reference either to the lasting qualities of salt, or perhaps to the covenantal

significance of sharing a meal with someone and thus “eating his salt.” Regardless, in the two other places in Scripture where this phrase appears, the eternal nature and binding character of the covenant promise is stressed. There is nothing more unbreakable than a Covenant of Salt, in other words (Lev. 18:19; Num. 2:13).

Now, where did God give this rule to David? Well, at his anointing by Samuel, for one. But most clearly in 2 Samuel 7, where God promised to actually give David rule over Israel, and to give his seed a perpetual, even an eternal, dynasty. That’s why Abijah stresses the fact that the covenant was made with David and his sons.

But what happened? Jeroboam rebelled. While we may question Abijah’s description of his father as young and tender-hearted (he was 41 years old [1 Kings 14:21], and his words are not the words of tender baby!), hey, it was his dad, and we’ll forgive him. Nonetheless, here is the theological payoff of Abijah’s speech. He insists that the kingdom of the LORD is in the hands of the sons of David.

Now, what does this mean? The natural reference is to the same kingdom of God which Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed. That kingdom is, in brief, “that dignity and authority by which He governs the church by His word and Spirit and defends and preserves it against all enemies” (Turretin, 14.16.1).

Notice several elements of this definition.

1. It is over God’s people. Now, does God as God rule over everything, wicked men and demons as much as good men? Yes, of course. “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all,” as Psalm 103 tells us. But there is another kind of Kingdom of God. That’s the one that is coming, that is growing, that is described in the kingdom parables as we read them in Matthew 13. Can God gain in dominion over creation? No, of course not. He is always completely in charge. Therefore, the kind of kingdom that can come must be a kingdom over a certain group. Well, who is that group? Let’s go to Colossians 1:13: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” So the coming of the Kingdom means that every last person who is to be delivered from Satan’s kingdom will be delivered from that into Christ’s kingdom.
2. Therefore, it is a kingdom instituted after the fall of man, as a rescue operation. Think with me for a moment. Is a kingdom without any subjects much of a kingdom? No, of course not. But in the Garden of Eden, Satan seduced God’s vice-regent Adam and stole God’s subjects from Him, in a certain sense. The rest of the Bible is the story of God getting His subjects back. That project we know as the growth and development of the Kingdom of God, and we read about it in the Kingdom parables of Matthew 13. Well then, when Satan stole the allegiance of Adam and got them to join his kingdom, God set on foot plans to bring them back under His own rule. Right? That’s how salvation is described in Colossians.

3. Therefore, the kingdom of God did not begin with the coming of Jesus; it existed ever since Genesis 3.
4. And thus, it is no surprise that for a time, that kingdom was expressed through the rule of David and his descendants. That rule was a type and shadow of the greater rule of the eternal Son of David. The evidence for this is found in the citations you have in your notes. In Old Testament times, David ruled over the same kingdom that Christ rules over now! Why else could Scripture say that Jesus would have the throne of His father David? It doesn't say a throne like His father David's, a throne analogous in many ways to the throne of His father David. It says *the throne of*. The same is true in the other references, where Solomon is said to sit on Jehovah's throne both by the Queen of Sheba and by the narrator!
5. Objection: Now, perhaps you're thinking that in actuality, the kingdom of God did not have its expression in OT Israel. Rather, the Israelite theocracy was similar to but not identical with the kingdom Christ will set up in the end time. That view doesn't work not only because of the direct statement of Scripture we just read, but because the kingdom of God is an ongoing reality. It exists and persists through time. The kingdom of God announced by Christ did not suddenly begin to exist at the Incarnation. Oh no. It was expressed long before that, in the calling of Abraham and even before that, in the promise to Adam of a seed who would crush the serpent's head. It continued to exist after the destruction of Judah and the exile in 586 B.C. The Kingdom of God is an ongoing reality. We also read about it in Chronicles. The kingdom of God was given a visible shape in the rule of Solomon and David over Israel, and we can learn from that visible shape.
6. So when you read about David and the house of David, you're reading God's prediction in things of what He would do in furthering His Kingdom through His Son. This is how we understand the Psalms. Are they partially true of David? Sure. His experiences are analogous to the experiences of Christ. But ultimately, many of the things said in the Psalms are most true of the suffering and reigning of Christ.

What does it mean that David and Solomon sat on the throne of God? What does it mean that the Kingdom of the Lord was put into the hands of the sons of David? This is explained by what theologians call the principle of the one and many. Basically, this is the idea of union between the head and the people comprehended under him. The Apostle Paul mentions Adam and Christ as showing this principle. In Adam all die; in Christ all shall be made alive. In short, there is a clear connection between the head and the members, such that whatever is true of the head becomes true of the members. Christ is the ultimate ruler over the Kingdom of God, but David and Solomon show us a sort of pre-enactment (not re-enactment; pre-enactment) of what that means. Just as a prophecy is a prediction in words, so a type is a prediction in things. I could try to come up with a summary of the points of comparison, but God has given us one. Come over to Psalm 89:20-37. Here we see the promises made by God to David. Clearly, all these things are literally true only of Jesus. But they were partially true of David--true enough that

David's reign is a prediction in events of Christ's reign. And the same is true of the whole history of Israel. Think, for example, of what we will see at the end of Kings: Judah is cut off and goes into exile for sin. Well, didn't the same thing happen to Christ? He was cut off, and went into exile for sin.

Thus, the purpose of this sermon is to explain how to understand the Old Testament. This intimate, inextricable union between the rule of David and the rule of Christ will provide for us a key not only to the historical books, typically less fruitful for devotional exercises in the experience of many of us, but also to the Psalms, where traditionally the people of God have ever found a way to express the cries of their hearts. Further, virtually all of the prophetic material in the OT deals with the royal office of Christ! So, brothers and sisters, do you desire an understanding that will open up the histories, the prophecies, and the Psalms of the Old Testament, and show you how in their original conception, the primal plan of God, they all point to Christ and speak of Christ--often under the colors of their age, but nonetheless vividly, and that also explains how your salvation comes to you through the work of Jesus?

But contrasted with the glories promised to the house of David comes the false worship of Jeroboam and all of Northern Israel. They have their hand-made gods. They ordain not-priests to serve not-gods, and yet they think they will triumph against the kingdom of the true and living God. Notice how the difference between Judah and Israel is summed up in these two things: **who is your king, and how do you worship?** In Israel, worship was a free-for-all. The state had its official cult, but if you could afford a bull and seven rams, you're in, brother, and you are welcome to lead worship in any way but one.

B. Second Argument: The Ongoing Practice of Levitical Worship, 13:10-11

That one way, of course, is the way God had actually mandated. In Judah, they worshipped the true God, not a no-god. They have a true priesthood. They follow the correct rites, the ones given to Moses by God Himself. The daily burnt offering represented the necessity of purifying the people every day. The incense represented the prayers of God's people going up to heaven. The showbread represented the people of Israel dwelling in the light of the presence of God. The Northern worship was defective in all these ways. It worshipped the wrong god in the wrong way. Its sacrifices did not purify from sin; its priests had no right to come before God; in short, the whole project was worthless.

C. Conclusion: To Fight Judah Is to Fight God Himself, 13:12

Israel was supposed to blow the trumpets when attacking a foreign city; here those trumpets are turned on their own brothers. This is nothing less than a claim that "God is on our side. Fight us and be destroyed."

Brothers and sisters, if you ask God for forgiveness, He will forgive you. But if you are determined to worship a false god, and to have as little as possible to do with the true God, well, that is the sin that got the northern kingdom destroyed. I'm not saying that if you forsake God you can never come back and be forgiven, because that is not the teaching of Scripture. But what the Bible emphasizes over and over is that so long as you persist in worshipping not-gods, you

have absolutely no reason to expect any grace, mercy, salvation, or forgiveness from the Father. Quite the opposite, in fact. You want to be forgiven? Ask, and you shall receive. But you hate Christ and want to see His Kingdom destroyed? Well, so long as that is your attitude, rest assured that He will work for your destruction. Don't expect Him to save you from hell when you're doing your best to get there. I can only repeat the words of Abijah: "do not fight against the LORD, the God of your fathers, for you cannot succeed." You can do this in the same way they did--by abandoning the true worship of God.

III. God Proves that Abijah Was Right, 13:13-14:1b

This is the crazy part of the story. Usually people in the Bible who try to manipulate God into supporting them get destroyed. It happened to Israel when they brought out the ark of the covenant to fight the Philistines. But God backs up Abijah and basically says, "Yes, everything you just heard is true."

A. God Defeats Israel, 13:13-19

So Jeroboam the sneaky, while he listens to Abijah's speech, has been busy setting an ambush. Obviously he's scared of what God will do to him! Jeroboam relies on human cunning and martial maneuvers. The children of Judah call out to God, who promptly smites Israel. A quick look at the lists of deadliest battles in the encyclopedia reveals that only in the trenches of WWI and the brutal meat grinder of the Russian Front in WWII were these numbers surpassed. This was all performed by the might of God, as verse 18 emphasizes. Judah recovered certain cities. In effect, the narrative is repeating over and over its point: God protects His people and destroys His enemies.

B. God Smites Jeroboam, 13:20

Jeroboam and Abijah died at roughly the same time, but the Chronicler wants us to get one thing clear: Jeroboam's death was fully from the Lord.

C. God Blesses Abijah, 13:21-14:1b

Indeed, notice the contrast with Abijah, to whom God gives a numerous seed in fulfillment of His promise to build David's house. Clearly God is vindicating Abijah, not because of who he is (his personal character was rotten) but because of who his Daddy is. He's a son of David, and so God fights for him.

Now, there are several things we learn from the visible shape given to the kingdom of God in the days of the Israelite monarchy.

1. A caution about how to take typological passages. Does this passage give us warrant to believe that the kingdom of God will certainly win a crushing victory over the forces of darkness in any particular encounter? No. This arises from the nature of this event as a typological event. Abijah's victory foreshadows the ultimate triumph of Christ. This story is here to tell us that the kingdom of God will win the war, as shown by this particular battle. But the story makes no claim about every battle; if you go over to 1 Kings 15, you will see that Abijah is recorded there as a wicked king. This man, who knew good theology, didn't live up to it. In other words, the same kingdom of God that gained an

apparent victory in one part of Abijah's life suffered an apparent defeat in others. People of God, this narrative warns us to exercise almost infinite caution in our interpretation of Providence. After all, Judah wins here, but it ultimately goes into exile. Christ Himself, the most faithful of all the servants of God, suffered torture and death and what looked like defeat at the cross. God will win the war against Satan, but He may to our eyes lose a lot of battles. In this age, we will often see faithful ministers and churches struck down. We will see good parents with apostate children, and missionaries who are apparently making no impact on the societies where they serve. Should we identify the cause of the church as the cause of the kingdom? Yes. But we must always remain hyper-careful not to read Providence. That is truly a book the reading of which has made fools out of the wisest of theologians. Remember simply that God promised us eventual victory, not instant victory.

2. Second, we learn the unity of the plan of God through the ages. The kingdom of God was not an afterthought. Rather, God had been preparing His kingdom for many centuries when Christ came. Think of the deep unity within the history of God's people. Imagine if I told you that Obama now reigns on the throne of Washington. Even though less than 250 years separate us from Washington, (which means that three ninety-year old Americans can take us back to Washington!), such a declaration just sounds silly. What do Washington and Obama have in common? Or if I tell you that Queen Elizabeth II reigns on the throne of William the Conqueror. What does a man from a thousand years ago have to do with the present monarch of England? And yet the unity of God's plan is so deep that at the Annunciation, Gabriel made a big deal out of the throne of David (Luke 1:32). And not one reader, then or now, has been like, "David? What does he have to do with it?"
3. Third, the glory of Christ as king. If you miss this, then you have missed the entire point of the books of Kings and Chronicles. Remember, the Israelite monarchy was an earthly version of the Kingdom of God. And what did Christ say about Himself? "A greater than Solomon is here!"
4. Submit to the Kingdom of God in the hand of the Son of David!