The Kingdom of God in the Big Story of the Bible

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Handout

Introduction: What Is the Kingdom of God?

Questions:

1. How would you explain the kingdom of God to someone? Why?
2. What Bible passage or passages do you first think of about the kingdom of God? Why?

Three points of introduction:

1. **The kingdom of God is not an "abstract idea."** It is not a doctrine that is disconnected from history and the real world. The kingdom of God comes in a story.
2. **The kingdom of God is an important biblical theme, but it is not the only important theme.** No theme can fully capture all of the important truths of the Bible. Other important biblical themes include atonement, temple, exodus, marriage, and more.
3. **The kingdom of God theme should first lead us to worship.** The theme of the kingdom calls us to do many things, but we should always be amazed that God has brought us into his kingdom by his loving sacrifice.

Graeme Goldsworthy's definition: the kingdom of God is "God's people in God's place under God's rule." This definition leads us to ask three questions right away:

1. Who are God's people, and how do they become his people?
2. Where is God's place, what is it like, and how do God's people get into it?
3. What does it look like for people and place to be under God's rule?

These are the questions that the big story of the Bible answers, from Genesis all the way to Revelation.

Genesis

Creation (Genesis 1)

The theme of the kingdom of God starts on the first page of the Bible: Genesis 1:26–28. Adam and Eve are created in God's image in order to rule under God on his behalf.

"Image" and "likeness" in the time of the Bible:

1. An image (statue) of a god was placed into the god's temple.
2. Kings could be called the "image" or "likeness" of a god.

3. A king could put a statue (image) of himself in a new land he had conquered. (See Matthew 28:18–20.)

Jeremy Treat summarizes the original plan for God's kingdom in creation: "God's reign through his servant-kings over creation."

The Fall (Genesis 3)
Adam and Eve commit treason. They rebel against their High King.
Promise of hope given in Genesis 3:15. "Victory through suffering" → "Royal victory through atoning suffering" (Jeremy Treat).

Call of Abraham (Genesis 12)
Genesis 12:1–3: promises of land, seed (offspring/children) and blessing. God's kingdom would come back through this family.

Tower of Babel vs. Abram's call

Jeremy Treat summarizes how God's kingdom would come after the fall: "God's redemptive reign through Christ and his reconciled servant-kings over the new creation."

Israel: a Kingdom of Priests

Exodus 19:4–6

Kingdom of priests means three things:
1. Israel has special access to God's presence
2. Israelites are devoted to God
3. Israel is supposed to represent God to the nations around them

Problems:
1. Many had hard hearts → Deuteronomy 30:6 promise of "circumcised hearts" after exile
2. God lived in the tabernacle, but not inside of the people → Numbers 11:29 Moses wishes that "all of God's people" would have the Spirit

David: the King over God's Kingdom

"The kingdom of God is the kingdom of David" (Scott Hahn). See 1 Chronicles 28:5, 2 Chronicles 13:8.

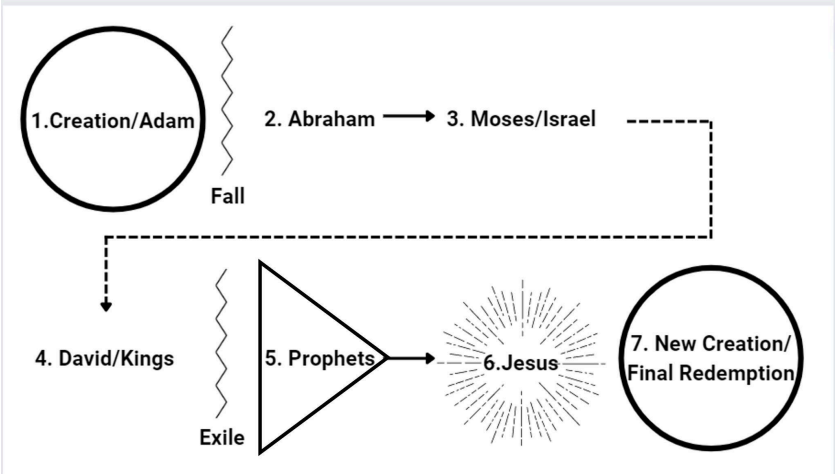
2 Samuel 7: God's covenant with David
Psalm 89: Reflecting on covenant with David
Psalm 2: Son of David and the nations (see Acts 4:24–28)

David refused to take the throne by force. (See also John 18:36.)

Solomon the “almost-Messiah”: see 1 Kings 4:24–34, 1 Kings 10:23–25. The high point of the kingdom of God in the OT.

The Prophets: “Your God Reigns” and “My Servant David”

The books of the prophets connect Israel’s story so far with how God would finish the story in the “age of fulfillment.” *The kingdom of God in the NT is another way of talking about the “age of fulfillment.”*



Ezekiel 34
God and “new David” would come to shepherd God’s people.
Read Ezekiel 34:1–6, 11–16, 20–24.
This is what Jesus means in John 10:11–18, Matthew 9:35–36 (also Luke 15:3–7, Matthew 15:24).
Closely connected to the promises in Ezekiel 36–37. Read Ezekiel 36:25–28 and 37:24–28.

Isaiah’s King and the Nations
Read Isaiah 11:1–10. Son of David will reign righteously by God’s Spirit, restored creation, enemies destroyed, hope for gentiles.
“Banner” for the nations in verse 10; see John 12:20–23, 31–33
Isaiah 19:19–25: God brings worst enemies into the one people of God → Ephesians 2:11–22

“Good news” (Gospel) in Isaiah
In the Gospels, Jesus proclaims the “good news” of the kingdom of God. This “good news” of the “kingdom” comes straight from Isaiah.

Isaiah's "good news" is the new exodus, return from exile, and the fulfilment of all of God's promises to his people ending in new creation!

- Isaiah 40:9–11: God is coming back to restore his people and shepherd them
- Isaiah 52:7–9: God is coming back to redeem his people and reign over them forever
- Isaiah 61:1–3: "The year of the Lord's favor"; see Luke 4

Daniel
Daniel 7:13–14: "Son of Man" receives worldwide rule, four beasts ("kingdoms of the world") crushed.

OT/Prophets Conclusion
The prophets look forward to the return of God, and the coming of the new David, to establish his kingdom. God and the king would atone for sin, restore the people, renew creation, and bless the world. This big vision of restoration and new exodus can be called "the kingdom of God."

OT ends with people waiting for the Son of David to arrive and the kingdom to arrive. See Luke 2:25, Mark 15:43.

The Gospels

Kingdom of God theme in NT starts in Matthew 1:1!

Gospel Introductions
The new David is here, and the age of the kingdom is dawning!

- Matthew 1:1 and the genealogy
- Luke 1:27–33, 1:68–79
- Matthew 2, the visit of the magi (wise men). Quotes from Micah 5:2–4. Matthew 2:11 → Isaiah 60:6

Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom

- Luke 4 → Isaiah 61: The vision of the prophets is coming true; the age of fulfillment has arrived.
- Luke 24:44–49

Son of David as Healer in Matthew
Title "Son of David" connected to Jesus' healings in Matthew's Gospel (7 out of 10 occurrences). See these:

- Matthew 9:27
- Matthew 15:22
- Matthew 20:30–31
- Matthew 12:22–23: "Could this be the Son of David?"

JRR Tolkien: “The hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known.”
Matthew 12:28: royal commission

Parables of the Kingdom: Matthew 13
“The kingdom of heaven is like…” the wheat and the tares, the leaven, the treasure, the costly pearl.
The big vision of the prophets (the kingdom of God) is coming in two stages, not one.

Kingdom of God *already* here and *not yet* here.

- During Jesus’ ministry, *already* here in Jesus’ teachings, miracles, presence. After Jesus’ death/resurrection, *already* here in the new covenant, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the coming in of the gentiles.
- *Not yet* here: “Your kingdom come,” end-time banquet, wicked judged, resurrection, new creation (“inheriting the kingdom”).

Two ditches: too much “already” vs. too much “not yet.”

“Already” - “not yet” quote from George Ladd::

> *This is the mystery of the Kingdom: Before the day of harvest, before the end of the age, God has entered into history in the person of Christ to work among men, to bring to them the life and blessings of His Kingdom. It comes humbly, unobtrusively. It comes to men as a Galilean carpenter went throughout the cities of Palestine preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, delivering men from their bondage to the Devil. It comes to men as his disciples went throughout Galilean villages with the same message. It comes to men today as disciples of Jesus still take, the Gospel of the Kingdom into all the world. It comes quietly, humbly, without fire from heaven, without a blaze of glory, without a rending of the mountains or a cleaving of the skies. It comes like seed sown in the earth. It can be rejected by hard hearts, it can be choked out, its life may sometimes seem to wither and die. But it is the Kingdom of God. It brings the miracle of the divine life among men. It introduces them into the blessings of the divine rule. It is to them the supernatural work of God’s grace. And this same Kingdom, this same supernatural power of God will yet manifest itself at the end of the age, this time not quietly within the lives of those who receive it, but in power and great glory purging all sin and evil from the earth. Such is the Gospel of the Kingdom.*

The Righteousness of the Kingdom: Sermon on the Mount
Sermon on the Mount is a picture of Jeremiah 31:31–34 coming true: the Law written on the heart.
Part of the new covenant promise. Jesus demands “greater righteousness” to be part of the kingdom. Then he dies to make this obedience possible for his people.

Jesus changes divorce rules from OT, explains that divorce was allowed “because of the hardness of your hearts” (Matthew 19:8). No longer applicable in soft-heart new covenant / kingdom age.

Kingdom Inauguration: Jesus’ Death & Resurrection

- Triumphal entry: royal procession to take his throne, Matthew 21:4–5 → Zechariah 9:9
- Jesus’ crucifixion is depicted as his coronation / enthronement
- After resurrection, “all authority” belongs to Jesus (Matthew 28:18–20), the son of David who will reign forever.
- As king, Jesus pours out the Spirit on his people: Acts 2:32–33. See also Romans 14:17, Ephesians 1:13–14

The Epistles

The whole NT—both Gospels and epistles—announce the kingdom of God.

Paul teaches the kingdom: Acts 28:31. This includes Paul’s big themes, like these:

- Jesus has come to God’s promises to Abraham
- Jesus’ death atones for our sins
- We are justified by faith and not by the Law
- We are united to Jesus Christ
- Jews and gentiles are brought together in one new body
- We are given the Holy Spirit
- We must walk in obedience by the Spirit
- We wait for the resurrection and new creation

Key passages in Paul:

- Romans 1:1–5
- 1 Corinthians 15:1–4
- Romans 10:14–17: “Good news” (gospel), Paul quotes from Isaiah 52 and 53
- All of Paul’s big themes come from the OT. See Acts 26:22.
- Good summary: Colossians 1:12–14

Don’t pit Jesus’ teaching against Paul’s teaching. The whole NT teaches the message of the kingdom of God: the big vision of the prophets is here! God has come back to forgive and renew his people and the whole world! And central to that is Jesus the King’s death for sinners.

Peter’s teaching: see 1 Peter 2:9–12.

My summary of the “gospel of the kingdom” taught in the whole NT:

> *The coming of Jesus marks the arrival of God’s kingdom foretold by the OT, and the fulfillment of all of God’s promises. Through Jesus’ sacrificial, atoning death Jesus starts the new covenant, fulfilling the promises that all of God’s people would someday have full forgiveness of sins, new hearts that walk in obedience to God, and the Holy Spirit*

within them. Everyone who turns from their rebellion and trusts fully and only in Jesus receive forgiveness and membership in the new people of God—whether they are Jewish or gentile. Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of the rest of God's promises coming true—the promises of God someday destroying his enemies and living with his people as King in a renewed creation.

Revelation

A lot of Revelation is about kingdom allegiance / loyalty. Mark of God vs. mark of the beast. Whose "name" are we stamped with?

Revelation pictures the complete arrival of the kingdom of God. (No more "not yet" part!) Jeremy Treat's definition finally happens: "God's redemptive reign through Christ and his servant-kings over the new creation."

- Revelation 1:4–6
- Revelation 5:9–10
- Revelation 11:15 (quotes Psalm 2)
- Revelation 21:22–27
- Revelation 22:16