

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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*God's kingdom program is a major theme of both the Old Testament and New Testament. Since the New Testament builds upon the literal meaning of the Old Testament message, a thorough study of both testaments is necessary to understand the kingdom. An inductive study of the kingdom, based on sound hermeneutical principles, will show that the Lord's plan for His kingdom dominates history from the first creation to the new creation. The Old Testament predicts a coming earthly kingdom, a kingdom that will be fulfilled someday through Jesus Christ, the second Adam, and the One who fulfills the covenants of Scripture.*

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### Introduction

The kingdom of God does not appear as a peripheral topic in Scripture. Both testaments speak of God's kingdom. Students of Scripture must understand the kingdom in order to properly apply its truths and their implications. Too often the readers of Scripture, and we as dispensationalists in particular, tend to limit the topic of the kingdom of God to a discussion merely of the eschatological and earthly messianic kingdom of one thousand years duration. In the same fashion, the discussion too often addresses the matter of the future land of Israel alone. On the other hand, too many scholars automatically assume that the kingdom of God refers only to greater spiritual realities with reference to salvation and either ignore or deny outright the reality of a literal eschatological and earthly kingdom. In truth, the earthly and eschatological messianic kingdom yet to come is only one part of the program of God. Referring to the overall kingdom program as the universal kingdom and to the outworking of that kingdom through history as the mediatorial kingdom helps in the discussion and development of theological thought.

In any treatment of this topic, we dare not treat the OT any differently than the NT treats it. NT writers took the OT seriously—and literally. So must we. As

Jelinek reminds us, “Wherever the testaments appear to take a differing view or where an OT subject is not explicitly treated, we are not justified in emasculating the OT by the virtues of the NT. Instead we must consider the perspectives in some way complementary.”<sup>1</sup> Unless a reader consistently spiritualizes every reference to the kingdom, it is next to impossible to deny that it is eschatological, earthly, and messianic. But does that messianic kingdom exhaust the biblical teachings concerning God’s kingdom? According to Alva J. McClain, “The Kingdom of God is, in a certain important sense, the grand central theme of all Holy Scripture.”<sup>2</sup>

The OT concept of the kingdom of God relates directly to God’s sovereignty throughout all the ages.<sup>3</sup> We serve a sovereign God who controls His program throughout history. God’s kingdom program does not commence late in the OT as some form of prophetic movement or as a new theological construct later converted into a spiritualized concept. God began His kingdom program at creation, long before the establishment of an earthly messianic kingdom. As Erich Sauer puts the case, “God is *Ruler*. He rules over matter. He forms and shapes and moulds it into a well-ordered whole. He is therefore the Lord of all development, the God of history.”<sup>4</sup> The eschatological kingdom brings to completion God’s kingdom program. We habitually give at least lip service to the literal eschatological kingdom whenever we recite the Lord’s Prayer—“Your kingdom come.<sup>5</sup> Your will be done,<sup>6</sup> On earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).<sup>7</sup> First, the prayer itself recognizes that the kingdom has not yet arrived, since it prays for it to come. It is yet future. It is not the church. Thus, the church prays the apostolic prayer appointed by Christ: “Your kingdom *come*.”

Part of the reason God’s kingdom has not yet come stems from fallen mankind’s consistent antagonism to God’s sovereign purpose for His own earthly kingdom.<sup>8</sup> From ancient times Babylon has served as the chief representative of this rebellion. According to Eugene Merrill, Nimrod (Gen 10:8–10) provided leadership

<sup>1</sup> John A. Jelinek, “The Dispersion and Restoration of Israel to the Land,” in *Israel, The Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, ed. by H. Wayne House, 231–58 (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 236.

<sup>2</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 4–5. This same focus is apparent in Eugene H. Merrill’s appropriately entitled OT theology, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference!: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, N.J.: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1990), 156.

<sup>4</sup> Erich Sauer, *The King of the Earth: The Nobility of Man according to the Bible and Science* (1962; repr., Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1979), 48.

<sup>5</sup> The aorist imperative calls for action viewed as a single whole, for action to be done in its entirety on that occasion. It involves a sense of urgency in petitions. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 719–20.

<sup>6</sup> The passive imperative occasionally is equivalent to a statement that is fulfilled at the moment of speaking. *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Updated (NAU).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 223.

in a movement to sidetrack the kingdom program of the Lord in favor of one of human creation. The Babel (Babylon) kingdom of God antithesis marks the pages of the sacred text, not only throughout the OT but the NT as well (Isa 47:1–15; 48:14–15; Jer 50–51; Dan 2, 4; Rev 17–18). Babylon epitomizes all the cities and nations of the world that challenge the City of God and His dominion.<sup>9</sup>

Babylon still opposes God’s kingdom whereby man intends to establish his own kingdom contrary to the one of God’s design. In the Fall, man abdicated his regency in God’s kingdom. After the global flood, Noah failed to exercise his mediatorial role as vice-regent. David, though the recipient of the kingdom promise (2 Sam 7:8–16), falls short of the eschatological kingdom hope. Thus, historically, the glimmers of hope fade and mankind still awaits the regency of the second Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:22, 45, 47), Jesus Christ.

Second, Christ’s prayer echoes and is patterned after the OT prayer of David himself which also focuses on God’s sovereignty in 1 Chron 29:11:

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all.

The Lord’s Prayer is kingdom-saturated and kingdom-oriented, and it acts as a reminder to the disciples that because of their fallen state they cannot be the anticipated mediators. Their leadership and their program, their teaching and preaching, and their miracle-working will not establish the mediatorial kingdom. The disciples are not the second Adam.

How can the kingdom of God exist in two different forms? It might help to understand the distinctions by comparing the universal kingdom to God’s omnipresence while taking the eschatological kingdom as comparable to His emphasized, localized residence by which the omnipresent God resides in the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud at the Tabernacle or at the Temple—or, His residency within the believer while not residing in the unbeliever. An alternative comparison might consist of the universal church as distinguished from the local church as its immediate manifestation. Yet another analogy exists with the believer being presently a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, but not yet residing in heaven. Therefore, both the universal kingdom and the historical, mediatorial kingdom are distinct entities, wherein the latter is the localized and temporal expression of the former.

### Considering the Vocabulary of Kingdom

A brief survey of the Hebrew root *mlk* (מלך) reveals the distribution of the concept of kingship and kingdom throughout the OT. Forms of this root occur 3,154 times in the Hebrew Bible. The vast majority of uses involve human kings and kingdoms. Soggin’s table in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (TLOT)* provides the statistics for the verb (347x) as well as the cognate nouns “king”

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 224.

(2,526x), “queen” (40x), “kingship” (24x), “kingdom” (91x), and “dominion/royalty” (126x).<sup>10</sup> The interpreter must avoid thinking that this word group comprises the totality of revelation on the concepts of kingship, kingdom, and royalty in the OT. We must consider other Hebrew words like רָדָה (*rādā*, “rule”; e.g., Num 24:19; Ps 110:2), מָשַׁל (*māšal*, “rule”; e.g., Ps 8:7 [Eng. 6]; Zech 6:13), כָּבַשׁ (*kbš*, “subjugate/subdue”; e.g., Gen 1:28), שָׁפַט (*šāpaṭ*, “judge/govern”; e.g., Obad 21), דָּן (*dān*, “judge”; e.g., Ps 9:5 [Eng. 4]), שָׂר (*śar*, “prince/commander/chief”; e.g., Isa 9:5 [Eng. 6]), כִּסֵּא (*kissē*, “throne”; e.g., Isa 6:1; Jer 3:17), שֵׁבֶט (*šēbet*, “scepter”; e.g., Gen 49:10), and מַטְּהָ (*matteh*, “rod/scepter”; e.g., Ps 110:2; Jer 48:17), and הֵקַל (*hēkāl*, “palace”; e.g., Mic 1:2). Even if we exhaust the vocabulary, some biblical texts that speak obviously of a divine kingdom or divine king do not manifest any of the regular vocabulary. Note how the Song of Moses at the Reed Sea (Exod 15:2–18) makes no specific mention of the expected vocabulary until the final line: “Yahweh reigns (מֶלֶךְ, *mlk*) forever and ever” (v. 18). Psalm 118 uses no kingdom vocabulary, yet in the NT both Jesus and several of the apostles understand its reference to the “corner stone” to refer to the Messiah’s elevation to kingship over the kingdom of God (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:4–8).

The reader will do well to commence this study with the understanding that a kingdom possesses four essential elements: first, a *right to rule*;<sup>11</sup> second, a *rule*; third, a *realm* to be ruled; and, fourth, the exercise of the function of *rulership*. These defining elements help to maintain an understanding of biblical teaching beyond a mere reference to the right of kingship or limiting it to the person of the King himself.

### Promised Potential Fulfilled

One of the major features of an earthly kingdom involves the fulfillment of God’s original creative purposes for mankind. Sometimes we tend to focus so much on Israel that we neglect the physical aspects of the messianic kingdom that apply to all mankind. However, one who commences the study with the first kingdom revelation will soon understand that God’s eschatological kingdom is an outgrowth of His kingdom from creation onward. McClain astutely declares that

if men would understand clearly the future consummation of the Kingdom, they must first understand the Kingdom in history; if they expect to understand the Kingdom of which our Lord spoke, they must first consider

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<sup>10</sup> J. A. Soggin, “מֶלֶךְ *melek king*,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 3 vols., ed. by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. by Mark E. Biddle, 2:672–80 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 673–74.

<sup>11</sup> McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 17 gives only three, but includes this *right* in his “rule with adequate authority.”

what the Old Testament prophets have said about it; if they desire to expound the Book of Revelation, they must begin with the Book of Daniel.<sup>12</sup>

With mild apologies to McClain, this writer begs to disagree very slightly and to make an adjustment. Biblically, in order to expound either the book of Revelation or the book of Daniel, we must begin with the book of Genesis.

Arie Leder, while expounding upon the story line of the Pentateuch, remarks that “Royal language is a pervasive metaphor in the Pentateuch.”<sup>13</sup> John Sailhamer, in a similar fashion, concludes that the major poetic seams within the Pentateuch (Gen 49; Num 24; Deut 32) link the narrative by means of a single theme focused on Messiah with royal imagery.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the entire Hebrew Bible, from Genesis to Chronicles, reveals a focus on dynasty and dominion that finds ultimate fulfillment through the line of David.<sup>15</sup> As Stephen Dempster notes, “Significantly, a key concept in the last narrative section of the Tanakh that begins with Daniel and ends with Chronicles is the term ‘kingdom’ (of God). The Tanakh ends on a note of hope, pointing to the future.”<sup>16</sup>

The flow of Scripture proceeds from a global perspective and narrows to a focus on the Davidic Messiah, then opens up again to close with the book of Revelation and its renewed global/universal extension of the kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup>

### Figure 1. Chiastic Structure of the Kingdom Program in Scripture

Genesis 1:1 **Creation**  
     Genesis 1:3 **God’s Light**  
         Genesis 1:26 **Man’s Rule**  
             Genesis 2:8–17 **Old Eden**  
                 Genesis 3:17 **Curse**  
                     ... etc.  
                     ... etc.  
                     Revelation 21:4; 22:3 **No Curse**  
                         Revelation 22:1–2 **New Eden**  
                             Revelation 20:4 **Man’s Rule**  
                                 Revelation 21:23; 22:5 **God’s Light**  
                                     Revelation 21:1 **New Creation**

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>13</sup> Arie C. Leder, *Waiting for the Land: The Story Line of the Pentateuch* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2010), 43.

<sup>14</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 242. See, also, Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 70–72.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. by D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 48–49.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>17</sup> See Dempster’s chart in *Dominion and Dynasty*, 232. In other words, the eschatology recapitulates protology in inverse order. Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter Books, 1984), 16 outlined this approach nearly thirty years ago.

**Figure 2. Chiastic Structure of the Anti-Kingdom Program in Scripture**

Genesis 1:1 **Creation**  
 Genesis 3:1 **Satan's Freedom**  
     Genesis 6–8 **Worldwide Judgment**  
         Genesis 10–11 **Babel/Babylon**  
             ... etc.  
             ... etc.  
         Revelation 17–18 **Babylon**  
     Revelation 19:11–19 **Worldwide Judgment**  
 Revelation 20:2–3 **Satan's Confinement**  
 Revelation 21:1 **New Creation**

Both of the chiasms presented in the previous two figures (Figures 1 and 2) can be extended much further than the nested parallels depicted above. The first chiasm focuses on the kingdom program of God while the second chiasm focuses on the anti-kingdom program resulting from Satan's rebellion and mankind's fall. Protology (doctrine of first things) and eschatology (doctrine of last things) point to Christ as the focal point of divine history (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Christ, the Focal Point of Biblical History**



The kingdom of God has existed through all time from creation (Ps 10:16). Geerhardus Vos noted quite succinctly that “A God who cannot create cannot consummate things because he is conditioned by something outside himself . . . .”<sup>18</sup> It comprehends the entire universe, not just mankind, not just planet earth (Ps 103:19; Isa 24:23). Although God is His kingdom’s High King and ultimate Sovereign, He has chosen to rule the kingdom mediately (Ps 59:13; cf. Ps 8). His first mediatorial ruler was the first man Adam.

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<sup>18</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2001), 1. Vos wraps up this thought as follows: “that will not lend itself to him for the execution of a set purpose and for the plastic handling of what is antecedently given to him toward that end. For eschatology, God needs not only to be the Potter sovereign with reference to the clay, but he needs to be a Potter who can produce his own clay with reference to its tractableness.”

Mankind's Created Potential

**Dominion:** Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:4–8; Hebrews 2:5–9; 2 Timothy 2:12.

**Fruitfulness and Multiplication:** Psalm 72:16–17; Isaiah 60:22.

In the pre-Fall world, God, in His own royal role as the High King of creation, established His chosen vice-regents, Adam and Eve, to rule immediately over all the earth:

“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” . . . God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:26, 28).

The Fall interrupted God's creation blessing and mandate for mankind. Tragically, fulfillment of mankind's promised potential cannot come to its fullest expression because of mankind's fallen nature. Any exercise of that original dominion proves to be incomplete and imperfect. The psalmist refers to that high and lofty role in Ps 8:3–9:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;  
What is man that You take thought of him,  
And the son of man that You care for him?  
Yet You have made him a little lower than God,  
And You crown him with glory and majesty!  
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;  
You have put all things under his feet,  
All sheep and oxen,  
And also the beasts of the field,  
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,  
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.  
O LORD, our Lord,  
How majestic is Your name in all the earth!

Thus the psalmist presents the ideal for mankind, not the current reality—the designed future of kingdom rule, not the diminished past and present. Of course, Messiah, as the “Son of Man,” will fulfill mankind's role as the human race's only perfect representative. Listen to the writer of Hebrews:

For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, “WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE

CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, “I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.” . . . Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, . . . (Heb 2:5–12, 14)

The writer states that “we do not yet see all things subjected to” Christ—His mediatorial kingdom has not commenced. In the end, even the currently reigning prince of this world, Satan (John 12:31; Eph 2:2), will come under the Messiah’s reign and kingdom power. As long as Satan reigns as prince of this world, the kingdom of Christ has yet to be established. For that reason Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come.”

### Israel’s Covenanted Potential

In the pages of the OT we find that Yahweh has entered into six covenants with the people of Israel:<sup>19</sup> the Abrahamic, the Mosaic,<sup>20</sup> the Priestly,<sup>21</sup> the Deuteronomic,<sup>22</sup> the Davidic, and the New. God unilaterally and unconditionally promulgated the terms or stipulations of all six biblical covenants. Man had no significant choice in their wording. The covenants were not the product of human manipulation—they were imposed and enforced by a sovereign God. Ultimately, all covenantal promises will be fulfilled.

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<sup>19</sup> These covenants are distinct from the Noahic Covenant which was established with non-Israelites long before the existence of Abraham and his descendants.

<sup>20</sup> The Mosaic Covenant is also known as the Sinaitic Covenant.

<sup>21</sup> The Priestly Covenant is also called the Levitical or Zadokite Covenant.

<sup>22</sup> “Deut also adds to the Horeb covenant another, made in the land of Moab, prior to the entry into the land, a covenant that seems to be a renewal of the former and similar in character” — Gordon J. McConville, “ברית,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren, 1:747–55 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 750. The Deuteronomic Covenant is sometimes given the title of “Palestinian Covenant.” Some theologians include this covenant in the Mosaic Covenant, rather than distinguish between the two.

Figure 4. The Biblical Covenants with Israel<sup>23</sup>

	Abrahamic Covenant	Mosaic Covenant	Priestly Covenant	Deuteronomic Covenant	Davidic Covenant	New Covenant
Nation	X	X		X	X	X
Seed	X				X	X
Land	X	X		X	X	X
Blessing	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kingdom	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:3-14; 22:14-19	Exod 19-24	Num 25:10-13; 1 Sam 2:35; Jer 33:17-18; Ezek 44:10-15; Mal 2:4-5	Deut 27-30	2 Sam 7:8-16; 1 Chron 17:7-14; Pss 2, 72; 89, 102	Jer 31:27-40

According to the **Abrahamic Covenant**, the following themes will highlight covenant fulfillment for the descendants of Abraham:

- Nation:** “I will make you a great nation” (Gen 12:2).
- Seed:** “count the stars . . . So shall your descendants be” (Gen 15:5).
- Land:** “To your descendants I have given this land” (Gen 15:18).
- Blessing:** “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (12:3).
- Kingdom:**<sup>24</sup> “your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies” (22:17).

If it is possible to demonstrate that the Abrahamic Covenant is a permanent, unilateral, unconditional, and immutable covenant, then there is no way that the disobedience of either Abraham, Jacob, or the Israelites could have abrogated or annulled its promises. First, Scripture labels the covenant as an “everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:7, 13, 19; 1 Chron 16:17; Ps 105:10). Regardless of circumstances, God’s promise is permanent<sup>25</sup>—He will eventually fulfill it. Second, God established His covenant with Abraham while the latter slept (Gen 15:12)—it was a unilateral commitment that did not depend upon Abraham’s continued obedience for its ultimate fulfillment. Yes, one might argue that this covenant could

<sup>23</sup> Cp. William D. Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 218, Figure 2. Over the past thirteen years, I have developed the themes more completely and, I believe, more accurately. Recommended reading: this entire *MSJ* issue presents articles by TMS faculty on the biblical covenants.

<sup>24</sup> See Gen 49:10.

<sup>25</sup> John H. Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 132, points out that possible translations of עולם “include ‘indefinitely, permanently, in perpetuity or perpetual, enduring, always.’ It expresses open-endedness or an agreement without specified end.” He states that “The implication of the terminology is that these agreements are not temporary, not stopgap, nor on a trial basis. They are permanent in the sense that no other alternative arrangement to serve that purpose is envisioned” (ibid.).

not commence until Abraham had left his home country (Gen 12:1), but once God enacts the covenant, its fulfillment no longer depends on Abraham's obedience. His obedience "was a foregone conclusion (Gen 18:19). The renewal to Isaac and Jacob was based upon the past obedience of Abraham, not on the continued obedience of the seed of Abraham (Gen 26:3, 5)."<sup>26</sup> Third, this covenant was unconditional. No conditions are stated in any of the repetitions of that covenant's stipulations. Fourth, God's promises in this covenant are immutable according to NT revelation (Heb 6:13–18; cf. Gal 3:15; cp. Ps 89:33–37). Biblical history emphasizes this fact by repeated confirmation of the covenant's promises to individuals like Jacob, who had been disobedient (Gen 28:13–15).

For the **Mosaic Covenant**, some of the same themes recur as a progressive development of divine revelation founded upon the Abrahamic Covenant:

- Nation:** "you shall be to Me . . . a holy nation" (Exod 19:6).  
**Land:** "that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you" (Exod 20:12).  
**Blessing:** "He will love you and bless you and multiply you . . . You shall be blessed above all peoples" (Deut 7:13–14).  
**Kingdom:** "and you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6).

Although expositors often overlook the **Priestly Covenant**, it likewise echoes at least two of these themes in its association with the Davidic Covenant:

- Blessing:** "My covenant of peace" (Num 25:12).<sup>27</sup>  
**Kingdom:** "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before me" (Jer 33:17–18).

Zechariah 6:13 reveals that the Messiah "will be a priest on His throne." These dual offices, king and priest, bring together the two key roles of the mediatorial kingdom's ruler. What Israel did not accomplish in their appointment as a "kingdom of priests" in the Mosaic Covenant, the Messiah will fulfill as their representative.

Later in progressive revelation, the **Deuteronomic Covenant** likewise spoke of a number of these themes:

- Nation:** "that He may establish you today as His people" (Deut 29:13).  
**Land:** "in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you" (Deut 28:11).  
**Blessing:** "The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand" (Deut 28:12).

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<sup>26</sup> William G. Bellshaw, *Clarifying God's Covenants: Adult Teacher Bible Study Guide* (Denver, CO: Baptist Publications, 1971), 42.

<sup>27</sup> Cp. Ezek 34:24–25.

**Kingdom:** “The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above . . .” (Deut 28:13).

When the prophet Nathan announced the **Davidic Covenant**, it also featured equivalent themes:

**Nation:** “That you should be ruler over My people Israel” (2 Sam 7:8).  
**Seed:** “I will raise up your descendant after you” (2 Sam 7:12); “your house . . . shall endure before Me forever” (7:16).  
**Land:** “I will also appoint a place for My people Israel” (2 Sam 7:10).  
**Blessing:** “let *men* bless themselves by him; Let all nations call him blessed” (Ps 72:17).  
**Kingdom:** “your kingdom shall endure before Me forever” (2 Sam 7:16).

One of the major issues concerning the Davidic covenant in present-day discussion/debate involves whether Christ is currently seated on the throne of David. According to John Walvoord, “The New Testament has fifty-nine references to David. It also has many references to the present session of Christ. A search of the New Testament reveals that *there is not one reference connecting the present session of Christ with the Davidic throne.*”<sup>28</sup> Some interpreters confuse the Father’s throne with the throne of David—the two are not identical—Christ is currently seated on the Father’s throne according to Scripture, not the Davidic throne.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the **New Covenant** contains the same basic themes:

**Nation:** “Shall [not] cease from being a nation before Me forever” (Jer 31:36).  
**Seed:** “I will sow . . . with the seed of man” (Jer 31:27); “the offspring of Israel shall [not] cease” (31:36).  
**Land:** “The city shall be rebuilt for the LORD” (Jer 31:38); “it shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever” (31:40).<sup>30</sup>  
**Blessing:** “I will put My law within them . . . I will forgive” (Jer 31:33–34).  
**Kingdom:** “the city will be rebuilt for the LORD . . . And the whole valley of the dead bodies . . . and all the fields . . . shall be holy to the LORD” (Jer 31:38–40).<sup>31</sup>

In summary, the dominant theme of all six biblical covenants is *blessing*. Since those covenants are based upon the Abrahamic, that is an expected emphasis. The second most frequent themes are *land* and *nation*. Biblical covenants indicate a continuing nation of Israel in the land promised to Abraham and his descendants. Ultimately, the true *seed* of Abraham is the Messiah Himself. The Messiah fulfills

<sup>28</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Co., 1959), 203. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 137–40 offers a response to Walvoord in adopting a “now-already” and “not yet” duality to the eschatology of the kingdom program of God.

<sup>29</sup> Showers, *There Really Is a Difference!*, 89–90.

<sup>30</sup> See Dennis M. Swanson, “The Expansion of Jerusalem in Jeremiah 31:38–40: Already, Never, or Not Yet?” *MSJ* 17, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 17–34.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* The reference is to the building of Jerusalem as the capital city of the Messianic kingdom.

all of the covenant themes in their totality in His various roles as the Seed of Abraham, the Mosaic Prophet and Priest, the Davidic King, and the Savior of Israel and of the world. He calls and governs the *nation*. He *blesses* the *land* and the people. He establishes and rules over His kingdom.

### **The Messianic Kingdom's Physical Blessings**

Before describing the physical aspects of the Messianic kingdom, we must not neglect its other characteristics:

- The messianic kingdom is primarily soteriological (Isa 52:7–10). It is a kingdom of grace, of unmerited divine favor (Zech 12:10). In addition, God establishes the messianic kingdom in holiness and His holiness pervades the kingdom (Ezek 28:25; Zech 14:20). He initiates the kingdom by pouring out His Holy Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28–29).
- Due to the spiritual nature of the messianic kingdom, sinful and immoral values give way to readjusted moral values in accord with divine perfection (Isa 51:4–5). Yahweh's own objective standard will measure all ethical thought and behavior (Isa 2:3; 30:20–21), so that Messiah will judge on the basis of an accurate appraisal (Isa 32:5; Mal 3:18). Personal responsibility will dominate interpersonal relationships (Jer 31:29–30) and truth will characterize all matters (Ps 89:14; Zech 8:3).
- In the realm of society, Messiah will abolish warfare and establish peace (Isa 9:7; Mic 4:3–4). Social justice will prevail in every class and race of mankind (Isa 65:21–22; Ps 72:4) and God will reclaim social wastes (Ps 72:16; Isa 61:4). Messiah will teach mankind to emphasize worthwhile relationships (Isa 42:3; Mal 4:6).
- In the political venue, the Messiah will establish Himself as the international authority (Isa 2:2–4; Ps 2:8–10) and will establish a world capital at Jerusalem (Jer 3:17). In His kingdom, the Messiah will put an end to the perennial “Jewish problem” (Zech 8:13, 23).<sup>32</sup> As a reversal of the curse at Babel, language will cease to be a barrier to all human interaction and relationships (Isa 19:18; Zeph 3:9).
- Ecclesiastically, Messiah will rule as priest-king over Israel and the world community (Zech 6:12–13; Ps 110:4). In the messianic kingdom, Israel will become the religious leader of the world (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6, 9) and the world's religious capital will be Jerusalem (Zech 14:16–17). As a result, the Temple in Israel will be the focal point of worship (Hag 2:6–9; Ezek 40–48).

Scripture often characterizes divine promises as perpetual in these covenants for Israel (Gen 13:15; 17:7, 8, 13, 19; 48:4; 2 Sam 7:13, 16, 24–26, 29; Pss 89:29,

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<sup>32</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 224, “YHWH has promised that Jerusalem will be restored, repopulated, and reconfirmed as the center of His covenant interests (vv. 1–8).”

36–37; 105:8–11; 1 Chron 16:15–18). Walter Kaiser points to the fact that “all three parts of the covenant (i.e., the seed, the land, and the gospel) were bound together as *one* promise with a promise that this one promise was *eternal*. . . . to use a theological scalpel to cut out one part is to expose the rest of this same covenant to diminution and a time limitation.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as Kaiser expresses elsewhere, any “conditionality was not attached to the promise but only to the participants who would benefit from these abiding promises. If the condition of faith was not evident, then the patriarch would become a mere transmitter of the blessing without personally inheriting any of its gifts directly.”<sup>34</sup>

Our focus here is on *the physical aspects* of the messianic kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Covenantal promises clearly indicate that the future nation of Israel will inherit the land of Canaan again. To this, both pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets agree (Ezek 36:8, 12). Land, the pre-eminent factor in the physical aspects of the messianic kingdom, comprises an indelible element in the Abrahamic Covenant’s blessings recited in Lev 26:4–12. Those blessings fall into six categories:

- (1) productivity (vv. 4–5; cf. Gen 24:35; 27:28; 30:43)
- (2) peace (v. 6; cf. Gen 22:17)
- (3) power (vv. 7–8; cf. Gen 22:17)
- (4) population (v. 9; cf. Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:6)
- (5) provision (v. 10; cf. productivity, above) and
- (6) presence (vv. 11–12; cf. Gen 17:7, 8).

Scripture associates all these blessings with the land that Israel will receive from Yahweh. They are consistent with all the various statements and restatements of the Abrahamic Covenant.<sup>36</sup>

In order to fulfill these promises, God will: (1) alter the topography (terrain) to make it more fruitful and more inhabitable (Ps 72:16; Isa 4:2; 27:6; 29:17; 32:13–15; 33:10–11; 35:1–7; 41:18; Ezek 36:4–11; 47:1–12; Amos 9:13; Zech 14:4, 8),<sup>37</sup> (2) change the climate to increase the rainfall (Isa 30:23–30; Ezek 34:26; Joel 2:21–24), (3) alter the nature of animals (Isa 11:6–9; 65:25; Ezek 34:25; Hos 2:18),<sup>38</sup> and

<sup>33</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6–12),” in *Israel, The Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, ed. by H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 211 (italics his emphasis).

<sup>34</sup> Idem, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1978), 94.

<sup>35</sup> One of the classic treatments of this topic is that of McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 234–41.

<sup>36</sup> William D. Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 113–14.

<sup>37</sup> A possible exception to such fruitfulness and habitability might be the region of Edom whose judgment will leave a scarred landscape even during the messianic kingdom (see Isa 34:8–15).

<sup>38</sup> “To reject a literal understanding of these passages about nature seems unwarranted, however, in light of the biblical teaching of the effects of sin on the natural realm (cf. Gen 1:29–30; 3:14, 17–18; 9:2–3).”—Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 237. “There seems no reason to doubt that this is to be understood literally. . . . Any adaptation of the eco-system involved will presumably be a restoration of the world to its unfallen condition.”—G. W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *The*

(4) enable Israel to extend her national boundaries<sup>39</sup> (Isa 26:15; 33:17) leading to the adjustment of tribal allotments (Isa 49:8; Ezek 47:13–48:29).<sup>40</sup> Messiah will also intervene in the physical welfare of mankind by putting an end to disease and physical deformities (Isa 33:24; 35:5–6; 61:1–2; 65:20; Ezek 34:16; 47:12; Mal 1:8).

Note that several of these characteristics were undeveloped or unfulfilled during the return of Israel to the land following the Babylonian Exile (viz., altered topography, climate changes, and extension of boundaries).<sup>41</sup> This would seem to contradict those theologians who insist that the promises to Israel for restoration were all fulfilled when Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led their various groups of Israelite exiles back into the land from Babylon. If these promises were fulfilled by the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile, “How then shall we explain the prophecy in Zechariah 10:8–12<sup>42</sup> that announces in 518 B.C. a still future return, which would not only emanate from Babylon, but from around the world?”<sup>43</sup>

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*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin, 6:1–354 (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1986), 88–89. There are those commentators, however, who reject the literal because “the fact that the lion’s carnivorousness is fundamental to what a lion is and that literal fulfillment of the prophecy would require a basic alteration of the lion’s nature suggest that another interpretation is intended” (viz., a figurative interpretation)—John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 283. Interestingly, Watts avoids giving any specific interpretation of Isa 11:6–9 (John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, rev. ed., Word Biblical Commentary 24 [n.p.: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005], 210–13). Given the recapitulation of protology in eschatology, however, Gen 1:30 makes it plain that God gave plants as food for all created land animals. Thus, in the eschatological history, the animals return to the same fare.

<sup>39</sup> Even if the reader identifies a minimal extension of the land (from Wadi el-'Arish to Nahr el-Kebir in northern Lebanon), it would include “the whole of the Phoenician coastal section from north of Beirut”—Kaiser, “The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6–12),” 218–19. No Israelite king in the Davidic dynasty ever controlled such boundaries.

<sup>40</sup> Cp. Gordon H. Johnston, “Millennium, Old Testament Descriptions of,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. by Mal Couch, 267–72 (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 270.

<sup>41</sup> Amillennialists deny any literal fulfillment to a new temple, to changes in the geography and climate of Israel, insisting that such interpretations “are out of line with the New Testament’s own interpretation, which relates the prophetic hope to its messianic fulfillment in Jesus.”—Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 341.

<sup>42</sup> Note the specific geographical entities identified in this passage (e.g., Egypt, Assyria, Gilead, Lebanon, and the Nile)—obviously intended to be literal. Any figurative interpretation would render the text virtually unknowable due to the multiplication of potential interpretations. Note, also, the spiritual relationship that Israel will have to God at that time: “in His name they will walk” (v. 12).

<sup>43</sup> Kaiser, “The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6–12),” 213. An allegorical approach to this text in Zechariah can be found in Thomas Edward McComiskey, “Zechariah,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, 3 vols., ed. by Thomas Edward McComiskey, 3:1003–1244 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 1183–86. E.g., “When we read promises of great repopulation we must not fail to see the church, for the promise to Abraham of great posterity includes redeemed Gentiles” (1183); in regard to the references to Lebanon and Gilead in v. 10, “The terms must be understood metaphorically. . . . both are metaphors for the Restoration, the time when the blessings of the new covenant became a reality. . . . Gilead is a metaphor for the Shepherd-King’s provision for his flock (Jer. 50:19–20; Mic. 7:14),” 1184–85.

## Kingdom Hope

The dominant characteristic of the messianic kingdom is that a holy God dwells “in the midst of a holy people in a holy land” (Ezek 37:25–28).<sup>44</sup> This one factor alone makes it impossible for the revival of the nation of Israel in Palestine in 1948 to fulfill the OT prophecies about Israel’s inheritance of the land.<sup>45</sup> Because of that singular biblical truth, not a single OT prophecy would be violated nor one divine promise contradicted, if the Arab nations should succeed in pushing the modern nation of Israel into the sea and ending their tenure on the land promised to Abraham’s descendants. Indeed, when God restores Israel to the land according to Scripture, they will be believers who have called upon the name of Yahweh (Joel 2:32).<sup>46</sup> Those whom He will gather into the land of promise will be converts experiencing His cleansing and His Spirit—He will give them a new heart and a new spirit with which to obey His Word (Ezek 36:24–29; cp. Dan 12:1). This is not the condition of the modern nation of Israel.

Let’s take a brief side trip to the teachings of Jesus in Luke 19:11–27. His disciples had “supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately” (v. 11). This occasioned Jesus’ response with a parable about a nobleman who “went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and *then* return” (v. 12). Before he leaves to receive that kingdom, he calls his servants to him, distributes some funds, and exhorts them to carry on until he returns (v. 13). In that same location the citizens demonstrate hatred for him and reject his rule over them (v. 14). By context, those are clearly the people of Israel to whom Christ came in His first advent. Later, when “he returned, after receiving the kingdom” (v. 15), he calls upon his slaves to account for what they did during his absence. Note that Jesus identifies himself with this nobleman. He is rejected by His people. He then departs from them to a distant place (in His case, heaven) to receive His kingdom and then to return (His second advent). Jesus has not yet brought His kingdom to earth, to Israel! At His ascension He left to receive the kingdom—He did not establish it during His first advent.<sup>47</sup> Acts 1:6 confirms this truth when the disciples again ask if He is going to establish it prior to His ascension.

Now, back to Ezek 37:21–28. With regard to this text, Hal Lindsey correctly asks that we consider the following points:

- (1) The Church has never been scattered in discipline among the nations.
- (2) The Church has never been in a civil war that resulted in *two* kingdoms called

<sup>44</sup> Gordon J. Thomas, “A Holy God Among a Holy People in a Holy Place: The Enduring Eschatological Hope,” in *Eschatology in Bible & Theology: Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of a New Millennium*, ed. by Kent E. Brower and Mark W. Elliott, 53–69 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 63.

<sup>45</sup> Cp. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference!*, 74–75.

<sup>46</sup> See Irvin Busenitz, *Joel & Obadiah*, Mentor Commentary (Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), 192.

<sup>47</sup> Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible*, 138, arguing that Christ currently possesses the Davidic throne, makes a point of the fact that Christ receives the kingdom before His return. However, he fails to adequately deal with the equal fact that Christ has not yet established that kingdom on earth.

Israel and Judah. (3) The Church has never been promised restoration to the land and mountains of Israel. (4) The Church *cannot* be in view when it says, **“They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived.”** (5) If this were in any conceivable sense referring to the Church, why does it say that *the Gentiles will recognize who God really is when He makes Israel holy and His sanctuary is among them forever?*<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the church is not Israel and Israel is not the church.<sup>49</sup> Bible readers must be equally distinguishing in their comparing the future eternal kingdom of God to the future messianic kingdom on earth. With regard to this latter comparison, Renald Showers makes the following careful observations:

During His reign Messiah will have dominion from sea to sea (Ps. 72:8; Zech. 9:10), but eternity future will have no sea (Rev. 21:1). Unsaved wicked people will be present during Messiah's reign (Isa. 11:4; Rev. 20:8–9), but no such people will be present in the new eternal earth and heaven (Rev. 21:8—in eternity future all the unsaved will be in the lake of fire). Some people will die during Messiah's reign (Isa. 11:4; Jer. 31:29–30—rebels will be executed), but there will be no death in eternity future (Rev. 20:14; 21:4). Children will be born during Messiah's reign (Jer. 30:19–20; Ezek. 47:22), but no children will be born in the new eternal earth and heaven. . . . These contrasts require the conclusion that Christ will reign over a kingdom on this present earth before it is destroyed and before eternity future begins.<sup>50</sup>

Such an approach differs from that of a New Covenant theologian like Steve Lehrer, who believes that the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were already fulfilled historically “by the time of the conquest of the Land of Canaan under Joshua.”<sup>51</sup> Those who confuse the church with Israel, the eternal kingdom with the messianic kingdom, and the conquest under Joshua with the Abrahamic Covenant's fulfillment all violate the same logical dictum: Similarity does not mean identity (or, in symbols:  $\approx \neq =$ ).

In an appendix to this study, a brief analysis of Obadiah 15–21 serves to demonstrate the results of a literal-grammatical-historical interpretation of an OT prophetic text. There are so many equivalent texts in the OT on the future earthly Messianic kingdom that it is not possible to expound every one of them here. One unifying factor, however, stands out in most of them: specific geographical details

<sup>48</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 108 (all emphasis is Lindsey's).

<sup>49</sup> For a detailed refutation of so-called replacement theology (wherein the church replaces Israel in God's kingdom program), see Michael J. Vlach, *The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism*, EDIS Edition Israelogie 2 (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2009) and *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Showers, *There Really Is a Difference!*, 95. Cp. Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. by Frank E. Gaebel (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1986), 6:945–46, who makes the same observations.

<sup>51</sup> Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology*, 32.

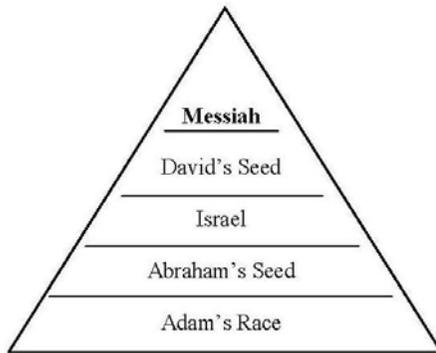
tie the prophecies to actual locations in Israel and the ancient Near East. In order to counter such clear testimony, one must either (1) allegorize on an astounding scale without any certainty at all regarding interpretive accuracy; or (2) one must make the theologically questionable claim that such prophecies are merely ancient near eastern hyperbole (amounting to bluster without any real fulfillment); or (3) one must gut the OT text by jettisoning such passages from Scripture entirely. All three of these options run counter to the NT writers' usage of the OT.

### Kingdom Government

**Form.** According to the OT, the messianic kingdom will be a monarchy (Isa 32:1). Christ, as the head of that government, will act as the ultimate representative fulfilling all prophetic relationships. The social strata of the kingdom's citizens will look like a pyramid commencing with a broad base and each subsequent level being progressively narrower (Figure 5). The governmental hierarchy will possess similar stratification (Figure 6).

#### Figure 5. Social Strata in the Messianic Kingdom

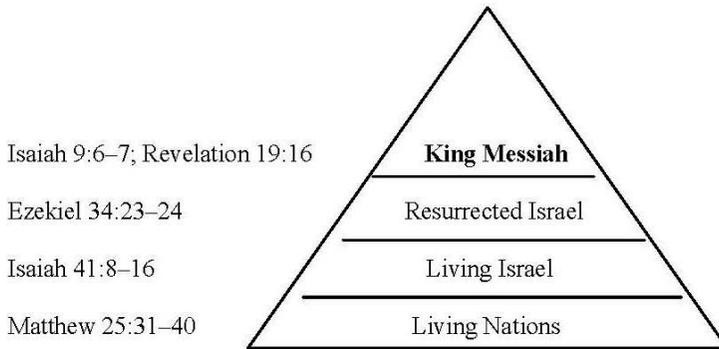
In order to fill out the biblical picture of the eschatological, earthly, messianic kingdom, concise summaries will round out this essay. The summaries address the kingdom's form, nature, extent, and duration.



#### Figure 6. Governmental Roles in the Messianic Kingdom

Jesus promised that His disciples will reign with Him in some heightened role in His kingdom (see Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30). Both Paul and John indicate that believers will reign with Christ in His kingdom (1 Cor 6:2; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:6). While the church saints enter the kingdom with glorified bodies (1 Cor 15:50; cp. 1 Thess 4:14; Rev 19:14), there are other individuals who at Christ's second advent either enter the kingdom with physical bodies yet subject to death (cp Isa 65:20) or

are subsequently born during the kingdom (obviously from parents also alive physically). Thus, the kingdom government possesses a hierarchical structure which might be described in a general fashion by the following diagrams of the social and governmental strata under Messiah's rule.



**Nature.** The messianic kingdom's governing principles include righteousness and justice (Ps 97:1-2), supernatural power (Ps 2:7-9), and mercy and tenderness (Isa 16:5; 40:11).

**Extent.** In its extent, the messianic kingdom will be universal (Dan 2:34-35).

**Duration.** As to length of time, the messianic kingdom will endure for one thousand years (Rev 20:1-7). Its effects, however, are everlasting (1 Cor 15:24-28).

### **Conclusion**

God's kingdom program stands as a major theme within both the OT and the NT. Our sovereign Lord's plan for His kingdom dominates history from the first creation to the new creation. His kingdom program will be fulfilled. He has not altered his plan—there is no "Plan B." He speaks plainly and specifically. If the reader cannot take the biblical text literally with regard to both a universal kingdom and a future, earthly, eschatological, messianic kingdom, then even the Lord's Prayer will suffer loss. We still pray, "Your kingdom come." We cannot inaugurate the mediatorial kingdom, because we, as direct descendants of the first Adam, are not the second Adam. Just as God created historically, so He will consummate His kingdom program in history. "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

**Appendix: Obadiah 15–21**

<p><b>15–16</b> “For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. . . .</p>	<p>This period is the eschatological period that involves divine judgment upon all nations.</p>
<p><b>17</b> “But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape, And it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions.</p>	<p>Mount Zion is the location and it is not a heavenly Mount Zion—it is the earthly one. Descendants of Jacob (the inheritors of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant) will take possession of the land God promised to give to them. Since this prophecy is much later than the conquest under Joshua, that period cannot be the fulfillment.</p>
<p><b>18</b> “Then the house of Jacob will be a fire And the house of Joseph a flame; But the house of Esau <i>will be</i> as stubble. And they will set them on fire and consume them, So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau.” For the LORD has spoken.</p>	<p>Both the houses of the nation of Israel (south and north) will consume the Edomites (descendants of Esau).  This is a physical conquest, since there will be no remaining survivor.</p>
<p><b>19</b> Then <i>those of</i> the Negev will possess the mountain of Esau,  <i>And those of</i> the Shephelah the Philistine plain,  Also, possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria,  <i>And Benjamin will possess</i> Gilead.</p>	<p>Restoration of Israel to the land of promise is physical, not spiritual. The geographic locations are neither figurative nor allegorical—they are literal. The restored remnant will take up residence in various locations and then move to conquer the rest of the land, which will evidently be under the control of their enemies. Israelites residing in the Negev will move eastward to seize the hill country of Edom. Israelites residing in the Shephelah (the foothill region of Judah) will take control of the area that the Philistines had controlled in the past. That same group will also take the hill country of Ephraim and the area of Samaria north of Jerusalem and west of the Jordan. Descendants of the tribe of Benjamin will take the Transjordanian region of Gilead in modern Jordan, the region of the biblical Ammonites.</p>
<p><b>20</b> And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel, Who are <i>among</i> the Canaanites as far as Zarephath,  And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad Will possess the cities of the Negev.</p>	<p>The Canaanites living in the region of Phoenicia (Tyre, Sidon, and Zarephath) sold at least some of the exiles (who had been removed from Judah and Jerusalem) to the Greeks (cp. Joel 3:4–7). Some exiles from Sepharad (a location identified with six or seven different sites from Sardis to Spain) will move into the Negev that had been vacated by other Israelites (v. 19).</p>
<p><b>21</b> The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion To judge the mountain of Esau,  And the kingdom will be the LORD’s.</p>	<p>Thus, Israelites will possess Mount Zion and the hill country of Esau. But, the main point is that Yahweh will establish His sovereign rule in the Messianic kingdom.</p>

- These details are physical—ethnic, political, and geographical.
- The text speaks of real people, real locations, and real events.
- Obadiah associates all of it with the kingdom.
- The details do not match any past historical situation.
- The church never took possession of these territories in the manner described.

- The church cannot be satisfactorily equated with these exiles.
- The fulfillment has not yet taken place, but awaits a future time—unless the interpreter should decide that the prophecy is erroneous and that it has not been fulfilled and will never be fulfilled.