

The Kingdom of God as Hermeneutic Grid

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Introduction

Much of what I would want to say on this subject has already been expressed in a previous article.¹ I will try not to repeat myself too much in this article, but the concerns of the two articles are closely related. In focusing on the kingdom of God we are really looking at a key element that gives biblical theology its coherence. We start with our view of the Bible and its authority. The word of God must be self-authenticating and thus self-interpreting. There can be no higher authority than God and his word for interpreting not only the Bible but also every other fact in the universe. That is the simple corollary of the reality that God created all things, all facts, and he alone can say what they ultimately mean and how they relate. This is also part of what we believe the Bible to mean when it sets forth the kingdom of God as a central concept. The kingdom involves God's absolute sovereignty in all things. The biblical story from beginning to end is one of God's active rule, however much it is challenged, from creation to new creation.

I cannot agree with those scholars who are nervous about proposing the kingdom as central to the biblical message on the grounds that the term "kingdom of God" does not occur until the New Testament. The particular phrase might not be a feature of the Old Testament but the concept is central to it. If, as suggested, the hermeneutics of the Bible must be revealed and come from within the Bible itself, the role

of biblical theology as a discipline will be crucial. This is because of the nature of the Bible and the dogmatic presuppositions we bring to it. We are dealing with a time-related set of documents that are contextualized by a particular series of events within the history of our world. They are people-related documents in that they are what human authors wrote about people using their own languages and history-related thought forms. The documents are also God-related in that they are first and foremost about God, and the Spirit of God inspired and oversaw the writing so that what the human authors wrote as their own words are received as the canon of Holy Scripture. In other words, what the Bible says is what God says.

The Problem of a Theological Center

Biblical theology as a discipline has regained some acceptance amongst biblical scholars and theologians. Most agree that there is a place for the study of the theological ideas of the various parts, books, or corpora that make up the canon of Scripture. The question of the unity or a central core idea of biblical theology raises, understandably, questions of the unity of the canon itself. Here there is no consensus. At the extreme "left" are the views that perpetuate the Enlightenment and its perspective that the Bible is a collection of purely human writings that can claim no privilege on the grounds of divine intervention or inspiration. On

the other hand, so-called fundamentalism is usually thought of as being on the extreme “right.” The problem with this suggestion is that “fundamentalism” has become a religious swear-word which, in popular parlance, refers to fanatical extremists who are constantly rocking the theological, ecclesiastical, and political boats. I am inclined to think that those Christians branded as fundamentalists are often nothing of the kind. A fundamentalist Christian should be *fundamentally* Christian in the interpretation of the Bible. In my view, this means having a gospel-centered hermeneutic which is often lacking in fundamentalists. Some so-called fundamentalists are actually more “liberal” than evangelical because their hermeneutic grid is one that is alien to the Bible.

There is, furthermore, an obvious rejoinder to the misuse of the term “fundamentalist.” There is a sense in which we are all fundamentalists, for we all have some fundamental frame of reference or starting point for our views of reality. At long last it is being recognized that the term “scientific” can no longer be applied in biblical studies to mean objectivity without presuppositions. No such neutrality exists. The question then becomes one of what fundamentals are viable and why. Secular modernism has long assumed that some kind of empirical objectivity exists. It has claimed a neutral and objective position which is contrasted radically with “faith” positions that are said to have no basis in fact. This is the concern of Christian apologetics and not the subject of this article.

My own conservative evangelical position adopts certain fundamentals that are, as I understand them, based on Scripture. At the heart of these is the gospel or, more

specifically, the person and work of Jesus Christ for our salvation. One place to start is Luke 24 as it records for us certain post-resurrection discourses of Jesus. That Jesus identifies the three parts of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament as about him interacts with the theological basis for the recognition of the canon of Scripture as authoritative. The Christian acceptance of the Old Testament as part of Christian Scripture must stem from the fact that there is a close relationship between the person and work of Christ and the Old Testament. The New Testament is the Spirit-inspired exposition of this relationship as it focuses on Jesus and on the ramifications of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Evangelicals accept the Old Testament as Christian Scripture because Jesus and the apostles claimed it for us.

As biblical theologians seeking to express the heart of the matter we can never escape the interaction of dogmatic theology with the assessment of how the Scriptures provide us with a unified biblical theology. Our interest in biblical theology would not exist if we did not have some prior theological understanding that Scripture relates to the fact that God has spoken. Thus, if all the Scriptures testify to Christ, they must express in some way the kind of unity that is in him. This unity is neither Ebionite nor Docetic. That is, the Chalcedonian definition serves us well as a dogmatic rule for describing the relationship of the divine to the human in Jesus. There is unity, but no fusion of the natures; there is distinction but no separation. The Ebionite heresy declared Jesus to be only human, even if he did have more of the divine spark than the rest of us. Modern “Ebionite” Enlightenment theologians have a similar approach

to the Bible. It is not a union of the divine and human word, but records of purely human religious ideas.

On the other side, when John warns of the antichrist which denies that Jesus has come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3) he addresses a prevalent Docetic error that was a constant threat to orthodoxy. Unfortunately, this error is still alive and well even among evangelicals. The Docetists said that Jesus was pure divine spirit and only appeared (Greek, *dokein*) to have a body. They thus expressed their Gnostic heritage and the Hellenistic notion that all matter is inherently evil. If this were true, Jesus could not, therefore, have had a material body. Evangelicals err as Docetists when they eclipse the real humanity of the believer (“I’m just a suit of clothes that Jesus wears”). In this they are actually, or by implication, denying the true humanity of Christ. The principal focus becomes “Jesus living *in me*,” rather than the historic gospel of Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection *for me*. Jesus living in me is not the incarnate God/Man. I hasten to add that no genuine evangelical would deliberately deny the humanity of Jesus, nor the importance of the cross and resurrection as historic events. But the focal emphasis has shifted and the heart of the gospel is now seen as what God is doing in my life rather than what God has done in the life of Jesus. This crypto-Catholicism of infused grace undermines the principal basis for assurance of salvation in the finished and perfect work of Christ. It confuses Jesus Christ, the God/Man, with his Spirit whom he sends to indwell his people. Such a focus affects our perception of what the gospel of the kingdom is about.

Another way of approaching this matter is to inquire into the relationship of

Jesus as the Word of God incarnate and the Bible as the word of God inscripturated. If we can conclude that the two uses of the phrase “word of God” are more than a mere homonym, or a weak analogy, the implications are significant. If, as we assert, the Bible as the word and Jesus as the word share a common basis in the revelation of God and of the way of salvation, then the relationship is one of a close unity. God does not have two words that bear no relationship to one another. Furthermore, Jesus indicates that the Scriptures are about him.² The authority of Scripture as the word of God is directly related, not only to the Spirit’s role in inspiration, but also to the authority of their subject: the incarnate Word of God.

There are, of course, distinctions between the Bible and Jesus. We worship Jesus as God but we do not worship the Bible. Nevertheless, as the word of God spoken is self-authenticating and authoritative, so Jesus Christ is self-authenticating and authoritative. We break the real nexus between Jesus and the Bible either by concluding that the Scriptures are not about the Christ, or by maintaining that the perspectives on the Christ in both Old and New Testaments are so diverse as to lack any real unity. But, if we conclude that it is true to say that the Scriptures are all about the Christ, then he provides the hermeneutical grid for all Scripture. This demands explication as to how we can discern the significance of the Christ as the center and interpretative key to the whole Bible. Once we establish the relationship of Jesus to the all-pervasive message of the kingdom of God we can assess the kingdom’s role as a hermeneutical grid for the Bible. I contend that the incarnation must be uncompromised if

we are to perceive the manifestation of the kingdom in Jesus.

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming that the moment of fulfilment had come and the kingdom of God was imminent (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:14-15). Kingdom references in the Gospel narratives flow in abundance. What the other Gospels refer to as the kingdom of God, Matthew usually refers to as the kingdom of heaven. The terms are demonstrably interchangeable. At its simplest, the kingdom of God refers to God ruling. The task of biblical theology is to try to discern in what ways this fundamental principle is revealed and expressed throughout the canon. It is reasonable to say that if Jesus truly is the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, if he is *the* truth, then we should start with his person and work as revealed in the New Testament. As we do this, we will recognize that the New Testament constantly proclaims Jesus in relation to the Old Testament. We are, thus, always being referred back to the Old Testament antecedents in order to better understand what it is that the New Testament is saying about Jesus as the Christ.

Part of our purpose in pursuing the kingdom references is to try to understand the concept of the kingdom of God. But biblical theology should not be reduced, as it sometimes has been, to word studies. James Barr put that one to rest over forty years ago.³ What, then lies at the heart of the idea of God's rule? Some have sought to distinguish between a realm and the dynamic of God ruling and to opt for one or the other as the meaning of the kingdom. I find this distinction unconvincing. The Bible does not leave the kingdom in the abstract. If God rules,

he rules somewhere, even if somewhere is everywhere. There is no abstract rule without a realm. Some scholarly discussions have focused on the Greek words usually translated in kingdom terms. As important as this is, it can only tell part of the story. The term used in translation cannot alone determine the meaning; only the usage can do that.

The significance of calling the gospel "the gospel of the kingdom" needs to be ascertained from the wider testimony of the New Testament. That Jesus is introduced by Matthew as the "Son of David" recalls the climactic role of David in the history of redemption and the formation of the kingdom pattern in the Old Testament. Luke-Acts also majors on a Davidic Christology which focuses on God's rule through his vicegerent.⁴ Mark's starting point is that the beginning of the gospel is something foretold in prophecy (Mark 1:1). Thus, "the time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15) indicates something a lot stronger than the inadequate NIV translation "the time has come." If the time is fulfilled it means that the kingdom of God is at hand. This is the fullness of time in which the Old Testament promises are fulfilled and redemption comes through the incarnation of God (Gal 4:4); the time when all things are summed up in Christ (Eph 1:10). Mark indicates that the gospel that fulfills the Old Testament promises is the gospel of the kingdom of God.

The point in all this is that the gospel of our salvation is, of necessity, the gospel of the kingdom. The evangelical propensity to focus on the work of God *in* us is sometimes expressed as the reigning of Jesus in our hearts. But, the biblical focus is that Jesus reigns at the right hand of God. Certainly he reigns in our hearts through his word and Spirit, but this

reflects the reality of Christ's exaltation and that God has made him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). His humiliation and death, which bought for us forgiveness, is the prelude to his exaltation by which we are justified (Rom 4:25). This exaltation is a kingly thing (Phil 2:9-11). The resurrection demonstrates that Jesus is the royal Davidic Son (Rom 1:4).

Jesus Christ as the revealer of the kingdom of God is nowhere more clearly expressed than in John's vision of the Lion and the Lamb in Rev 5:1-14. The rule of Christ is here linked with his worthiness to open the scrolls, that is, to reveal the truths of the kingdom. This worthiness is in turn linked with his suffering as the Lamb by which he makes a kingdom of priests to our God (vv. 9-10).⁵ In Revelation 7, John sees the twin visions of the perfect number of redeemed Israel along with the great multitude of redeemed Gentiles.⁶ The Lamb in the midst of the throne is their shepherd (v. 17). The shepherd is the common metaphor for the king in Israel (for example, Jer 23:1-8; Ezek 34:1-24; John 10:1-30). The gospel is God's means of bringing about the consummation of the kingdom, and at the heart of the gospel is the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Kingdom Structure and the Incarnation

When dealing with the complex unity of the Bible we may propose various starting points for the investigation of our subject of the kingdom of God. The fact that the term comes into prominence with the earthly ministry of Jesus gives us one more reason to start with him. The other is simply the fact that Jesus and the apostles, along with the other New Testament authors, focus on Jesus in a way that constantly draws attention to him

as fulfilling the hope of Israel. It seems to me that there are at least two ways of approaching the person and work of Jesus. One is to consider the ontological significance of the incarnation of God. The other is to take up the matter of the nature of his role as fulfiller of the Old Testament hope.

The Old Testament gives ample evidence of the centrality of the reign of God and the role of kingship in Israel in relationship to God's rule. These two dimensions are seen in the creation account in Genesis 1. The implications of creation *ex nihilo* cannot be avoided. God is reigning Lord. Yet, he delegates to humans the role of dominion over the rest of creation. Thus, God rules through his human vicegerents. This dominion-function is forfeited by rebellion so that the roles are confused. The redemptive promise of Gen 3:15 finds a preliminary expression in the salvation of Noah and his family, along with the animals, in the ark. The call of Abraham links the twin concepts of covenant as divine promise and kingdom as divine rule. The rule of God and the delegated rule of chosen humans, subsequently revealed as prophets, priests, and kings, come to a climax in David and his son.

That Yahweh reigns (*YHWH mālak*) may be regarded by some as an abstract notion.⁷ Yet this phrase, occurring as it does in certain Psalms and in David's thanksgiving psalm in 1 Chron 16:31, expresses the rule of God in creation, in salvation, and in the affairs of the nations.⁸ These are hardly abstract notions. The question of Israel's kingship has always been disputed on the grounds of historical criticism. There are those, as Childs comments, that see the references to Yahweh's kingship and the role of a king

in Israel going back to Moses as retrojections.⁹ Childs notes the criticism of John Bright's organic notion of the kingdom as losing the tradition-history perspective. In other words, Bright is considered too conservative in his view of the Scripture record.¹⁰

Elsewhere I have proposed a deliberately reductionist approach to the kingdom on the grounds that there appears to be a commonality that undergirds all the varying expressions of God's rule throughout Scripture. This, I believe, in no way obscures the many nuances of the biblical idea of the kingdom, but it allows us to penetrate to the essential nature of it and to trace its progressive revelation in Scripture. The fact that the grand consummation in Revelation recalls the beginnings in Eden suggests that the first expression of the kingdom is creation with its climax in the Edenic fellowship between God and the human pair. Adam and Eve are subject to the Creator-Lord, and are intended to reflect his kingship through their own assigned dominion over the rest of creation. The proposal of a "skeleton" definition of the kingdom as "God's people in God's place under God's rule" invites testing in the light of the entire canon of Scripture.¹¹ I cannot think of any place in Scripture that is not concerned with this structure in reality.¹²

To propose that Jesus *is* the kingdom is to go beyond the idea that he brought in the kingdom in the way he performed his role as savior. The implications of Paul's view of the "cosmic" Christ in Col 1:15-20 would seem to be that he is the "blueprint" for creation. That all things were created "in him" (*en auto*), and that in him "all things hold together" (Col 1:16, 17) begs explanation in terms of the

kingdom. This is where dogmatic theology must help us. The hypostatic union of God and Man in Jesus is a perfect union of God and humanity. Humanity, in turn, is the pinnacle of the created order. Jesus, as God incarnate, combines perfectly, and without any dislocation of relationships, all aspects of reality: God, mankind, material and non-material creation.¹³ We cannot construe the phrase "firstborn of all creation" to mean that Christ is merely a created being (Col 1:15), since he himself is the Creator (Col 1:16-17). But, as the incarnation of God, he does embody the created order: "in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). We could explore this in terms of the dogmatic formulation of the incarnation. Chalcedon again springs to mind in its essence declaring that God and Man unite with unity (but not fusion) and distinction (but not separation). This is how the Christian church has expressed the related realities of the triune Godhead and the incarnate Son.

The kingdom is about the relationship of God to mankind made as the pinnacle of all creation. Jesus Christ is the perfect expression of this relationship and provides for us the pattern of truth. The age-old philosophical problem of the relationship of the one and the many, of particularity to generality, is given its definitive answer in the incarnation which, in turn, points to the relationships within the triune Godhead. Of course we need to do more than say that all relationships are expressions of both unity and distinction. We need to be able to indicate the nature of the unity and the nature of the distinctions in each case. But this does give us a hermeneutical check for understanding all relationships within the Bible. We recognize the canon as a unity with diversity. Some want to stress the unity

to the point of fusion. This happens when there is no room for progressive revelation or for typological transformations (in which the antitype is greater than the type). Some alleged literal interpretations of prophecy are prone to this problem depending on how one understands the meaning of "literal."¹⁴ Inevitably, literalist interpretations are forced to adapt the fulfillment of prophecy to suit contemporary or future political and technological circumstances, but seem unwilling to adapt to the gospel. Then there are others who so want to avoid "literal" that they stress the distinctions to the point of a virtually complete separation. This is the tendency of the history of religions approach (*Religionsgeschichte*) which sees religious development as culturally contingent.

The dogmatic application of the kingdom matrix, then, approaches the relationships of the parts to the whole, and especially the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament, in the light of the unity/distinction paradigm that stems from the revelation of the triune God in the person of the God/Man Jesus Christ. The polarities of promise/fulfillment, type/antitype, salvation-history/eschatological consummation, and even of law/grace, all exhibit according to their own characteristics the structure of unity/distinction. Unity/distinction also structures so much within our dogmatic or systematic theology. The following two examples illustrate the point.

(1) The relationships expressing human sexuality, as God intended it to be, have a "kingdom" structure of unity/distinction. Some theologians (e.g., Barth and Brunner) have suggested that sexual polarity is at the heart of our being created in the image of God. This implies that gender differences and mutuality reflect the

unity/distinction of the Trinity. The two becoming "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) does not eliminate this polarity nor their individuality. Marriage should express the unity of man and wife without fusion; that is, without eliminating either the individuality of each or the distinct sexuality of each. The reason same-sex unions should not be recognized as marriages, is that they involve unity that moves towards fusion by removing the proper distinctions. If Barth and Brunner are right, homosexuality is one more confusion of the image of God in man.

(2) The big question of God's sovereignty and human responsibility is addressed by this framework. Once we recognize that Jesus was both sovereign God and responsible human without any conflict, the issue comes into focus. Many Christians object to the doctrine of predestination because they cannot square it with a popular unbiblical notion of free-will. But, while the will is in bondage, nevertheless we are still held responsible for our deeds. We make choices, but apart from God's grace, we make them as rebels against God's rule. The unity/distinction framework should enable us to deal with the apparent antinomy of predestination and human responsibility. It also addresses the question of who hardened Pharaoh's heart. Was it God or Pharaoh? Answer: Yes!¹⁵

The doctrine of the incarnation indicates that Jesus is God, the people of God, and the place where God and humanity meet perfectly (Immanuel). He is, thus, within himself the kingdom of God perfectly, if representatively, expressed. As such he points to the unity and distinction in the Godhead and in all aspects of creation. The gospel of the kingdom thus revealed provides a hermeneutical grid for all real-

ity which, of course, includes the Bible. The ultimate significance of every relationship, every fact, every event, is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Nothing has ultimate meaning apart from him. And, in all relationships the operative structure is unity/distinction.

The Kingdom Structure of Scripture

The other approach that we may take to this question of the kingdom is to examine the actual way the biblical account of God's activity unfolds. I have expressed my views on this in a number of places and I don't want to repeat myself unnecessarily.¹⁶ In summary, I have followed the lead of some biblical theologians who have pointed out an essentially three-fold structure to biblical revelation. My own teacher, Donald Robinson, first sowed the seed in me of the idea of this approach when I was a student at Moore College. His views are set out in his writings.¹⁷ The proposal is that the kingdom of God is revealed in three stages: in Israel's history from Abraham to Solomon's building of the temple, in prophetic eschatology, and in its fulfilment in Christ.

Since this understanding does, for me, provide a coherent structure for the whole Bible I have been disappointed to find so little of it in other evangelical biblical theologians. It involves, after all, a way of understanding that most difficult and important matter of the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament. What seems to me to be demonstrable does not seem so to a lot of other evangelicals. This may be due to a blinkered approach on my part, which is why I feel the need to continually test the rationale for such a scheme. A lot is at stake for, if this is a valid understanding of biblical theology

and the grand theme of God's kingdom, it provides us with an indispensable hermeneutic grid for the understanding of the whole of Scripture.

There are two complementary modes of attack for this matter. The one is to examine the New Testament for evidence of such a structural understanding. The other is to look at the Old Testament on its own terms to see if there is an obvious structure there. If we allow the unity of Scripture as the one word of the one God about the one way of salvation, we can proceed without the diversion of questions of sources and their pre-history. The Torah and the Prophets (Former and Latter) present a coherent account of the acts of God in creation and redemption. On this basis we may propose that the first expression of the kingdom is in the Garden of Eden. The fall and the subsequent degradation of human relationships in Genesis 3-11 point to the absolute necessity for some kind of action to rectify the situation. This comes about with the calling of Abraham and the promises made to him and to all the nations of the world (Gen 12:1-3). The notion of covenant is thus taken up in earnest though not for the first time.¹⁸ Some would prefer covenant as a central theme rather than that of kingdom. But the covenant is the formalizing of a relationship which conveys membership in the kingdom. A covenant theology sets out the promises of God as the basis of the acts of God in establishing his kingdom.

There is a theological bracketing or *inclusio* in the covenant perspective that is significant. The summary of the Abrahamic covenant in Gen 17:7 is that God establishes the covenant "to be God to you and to your offspring after you." This is later expressed in a phrase that will be

repeated from time to time with kingdom overtones, "And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev 26:12).¹⁹ The theological link occurs in the covenant made with David that points to David's son as temple builder and possessor of the throne in the kingdom: "I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son." (2 Sam 7:13-14) Two things happen here: the covenant summary is now focused on one man who is the son of David and the son of God, and the themes of covenant, kingdom, temple, and son of God are explicitly related. Son of God is the title of God's people, Israel, and here Solomon as king is their representative.²⁰ This is a matter which has important implications for Christology. When God declared that Jesus, at his baptism, was his Son, he names him as the true Israel. Luke's genealogy (Luke 3:23-38) extends this to show that, as the Son, Jesus is the true Adam and, thus, the true humanity.

The pericope of 1 Kings 3-10 focuses on Solomon's God-given wisdom. This is demonstrated in his splendid kingdom, his court, the building of the temple, and finally his "ministry" to the queen from one of the nations. But, 1 Kings 11-23 tells a different story: one of apostasy and decline. Whereas the kingship of Yahweh had up to this point been seen mostly in his acts of redemption, it is now expressed more markedly in terms of judgment.²¹ Of course the redemption and judgment go together, but the emphasis from Genesis 12 to 1 Kings 10 is on redemption. Furthermore, until the eschatology of the prophets emerges, we do not see any conceptual development of the kingdom of God in Israel beyond the glories of

Solomon's reign. It may seem curious, given this prominence of Solomon who is the wise, temple-building king, that he is almost completely ignored in the New Testament. The explanation seems to be that the covenant promise of the kingdom is made to David. Solomon as son of David, by his failures, points to the need for a true Son of David yet to come.

The second structural point emerges out of the Latter Prophets and, in particular, their eschatology. Uniformly, the prophetic books contain three elements albeit differently expressed according to their circumstances. These elements are indictment of sin or covenant-breaking, judgment, and redemptive promises. Furthermore, the Prophets express their eschatology as a recapitulation of the events of Israel's history from Abraham to David and Solomon (i.e., to the temple in Zion). Covenant, redemption from captivity, entry in to the promised land, Jerusalem (Zion), the temple, and the Davidic kingship are all themes of the prophetic view of restoration. The Kingdom, then, has been given two major expressions in the Old Testament. The first has been experienced in history but has failed because of Israel's sin. The second is promised for the future as perfect, without possibility of failure, glorious, and forever. This kingdom does not eventuate during the Old Testament period.

It remains then for the New Testament to assert that in and through Jesus of Nazareth there is a new covenant, a new exodus, and a new kingdom of the new Israel. It declares that Jesus is the Son of David, the new temple, and the new realm in which God is with people (Immanuel). We must examine to what extent the New Testament writers give expression to this kingdom structure of the Old Testament

in relation to the New. The emphasis on Jesus as the son of David is in keeping with his self-designation as Son of Man. Both are kingship terms. Both point to the kingdom of God as brought in by Jesus and as the basic concept of the Old Testament which testifies to him.

The nature of the kingdom of God as a hermeneutic grid is testable by the New Testament and its use of the Old. Of course this is a complex matter and different New Testament authors have their own approach. Matthew's use of the genealogy, and the structure he gives it, is important. As son of Abraham and son of David Jesus is the son of the covenant and of the kingdom. Matthew groups the generations from Abraham to David, from David to the captivity, and from the captivity to Jesus. If David is the climax of kingdom expression in Israel's history, the exile shows why it is not the ultimate expression. Only by moving on to Jesus can we find the reality. The significance of this genealogical descent of Jesus emerges in the birth narrative that follows. The angel addresses Joseph as son of David (Matt 1:20). The magi come looking for the king (Matt 2:2) and immediately the conflict with the false king Herod begins; a conflict that anticipates the conflict with Satan's bid for kingship (Matt 4:8-10).

In Israel's history the role of Moses and the law was integral to the nature of God's kingdom. Above all, the king was intended to rule according to God's law (Deut 17:14-20). So in Matthew's Gospel the son of David shows the grace of law in the Sermon on the Mount. His miracles and parables of the kingdom lead to the time of suffering when he will be mocked as king of the Jews (Matt 27:11, 29). The grand climax is the claim of the resurrected Jesus to be king; to have all author-

ity in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18).

Other New Testament writers have their own perspectives on the kingdom as it comes with Jesus, but it is always there. Thus, Mark sees the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises as the bringing in of the kingdom (Mark 1:1, 14-15). Luke's birth narrative focuses on the kingdom of David (Luke 1:27, 32-33, 68-69; 2:4, 11) which includes the temple and its redemptive ministry (Luke 1:57-79; 2:22-35, 46-49). Luke is full of Royal Davidic Christology.²² John goes straight to the Word who is the Creator-Lord (John 1:1-5). Through faith in this Word believers are given the right to be children of God, people of the kingdom (John 1:12; 3:1-16). In Acts we have Luke's account of how the kingdom comes by the preaching of the gospel in all the world (Acts 1:6-8; 2:22-36). Stephen's message to the Jews is that they must move on from the temple of Solomon and, by implication, embrace the reality of the new as it is in Jesus (Acts 7:44-53). Paul's first sermon establishes the eschatology of all his writings (Acts 13:16-39). The essential point is that the resurrection of Jesus is the fulfilment of all God's promises to Israel (Acts 2:32-33). For Paul, the gospel is the fulfilment of the hope of Israel (Acts 26:6-8; 28:20).

One last observation needs to be made about the kingdom and its coming in the New Testament. The Day of the Lord is seen in the Old Testament as a single great event in which final salvation and final judgment are worked out. The New Testament gives us a fuller perspective based on the way the gospel actually achieves the coming of the kingdom. It does this by declaring all to be fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus which, of course, implies his birth, life, ministry, and death. Thus, the end time came with the earthly ministry

and exaltation of Jesus (Acts 2:32-33; 1 Cor 10:11, 2 Cor 1:20; 1 Pet 1:20; 1 John 2:18). The things that the Old Testament promises as events of the end-time Day of the Lord are things that are found in Jesus. He is Immanuel; he is the new temple; he is true Israel; he is the reigning son of David; he is the seed of Abraham.

But this end is not confined to Jesus in his exaltation. It unites believers to the risen Christ through the ministry of word and Spirit. The kingdom that has come is also the kingdom that is now coming. Such is the relationship of these two "ends" that the believer is deemed to have been a part of the kingdom that has come. Union with Christ means that we are already at the end and our goal in heaven (Eph 2:5-6; Col 3:1-5; 1 John 3:1-3). The kingdom that has come in Jesus, and is now coming in the world, is the kingdom that will be revealed in glory at the return of Jesus to judge the living and the dead.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued two main points. The first is that Jesus is the kingdom of God that has already come in a representative though potent way. Consequently, the relationship of Jesus the God/Man to the word of Scripture about the kingdom is basic. The way God is as Trinity, and the way Jesus is as the incarnate God, is reflected in the way the creation is. The universe is a Trinity-reflecting universe. Part of this universe is the Bible. The kingdom, as it is in Jesus affects the way the Bible is and thus the way we should read and understand it.

The second main point is that the Bible speaks of the reality of the kingdom as its central issue. Other perspectives are simply that: other perspectives on the

kingdom of God. The paradigm in Israel's history is that of the covenant which leads to the glories of the kingdom under David and Solomon. At the heart lie Zion, the temple, and the kingship. This kingdom that develops in the narrative history of the Old Testament, and that is recapitulated in prophetic eschatology, is the basis for the New Testament's kingship Christology.

The kingdom, then, functions as a hermeneutical grid for the whole of Scripture. It must do this since it is the hermeneutical reference point for the universe and its destiny as Scripture portrays it. When properly conceived, the kingdom of God is the way God reveals and interprets his being, his doing, and his purposes for all reality. In submitting to the rule of Christ we must include with that submission our acceptance of the divine revelation of Scripture that is self-authenticating and self-interpreting.

ENDNOTES

¹Graeme Goldsworthy, "Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 10, no. 2 (2006): 4-18.

²Luke 24:25-27, 44-45; John 5:39, 45-47; Acts 13:32-33.

³James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University, 1961); idem, *Biblical Words for Time* (London: SCM, 1962).

⁴This is given a useful treatment by Scott Hahn, "Kingdom and Church in Luke-Acts," in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation* (ed. Craig Bartholomew, Joel Green, and Anthony Thiselton; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 294-326.

⁵I have proposed in *The Gospel in Revelation*, now published in *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), that

the Book of Revelation is essentially a book about the gospel and its implications for the reaching of the end.

⁶I have changed my view of the significance of Revelation 7 from that expressed in my book *The Gospel in Revelation*. As I have indicated in my *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 285f, I believe John maintains a biblical-theological perspective on the role of Abraham's descendants as the mediators of God's blessing to the nations.

⁷So expressed by G. Dalman. See B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London: SCM, 1992), 631.

⁸Psalms 10:16; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1.

⁹Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 634. See Exod 15:18; 19:6; Deut 17:14ff.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 633.

¹¹*The Goldsworthy Trilogy*, 53-4.

¹²See my *According to Plan* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 232.

¹³On this view, the spiritual world of angels is part of the created order though distinct from the material creation.

¹⁴Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (2d. ed.; Grand Rapids: Academie, 1993), Chapters 8 and 9, discusses the problems of maintaining a "literalist" hermeneutic.

¹⁵Exod 7:3; 8:13, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35.

¹⁶See *Gospel and Kingdom* (1981) now in *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000); *According to Plan* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991); and "Is Biblical Theology Viable?" in *Interpreting God's Plan: Biblical Theology and the Pastor* (ed. R. J. Gibson; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

See also my "Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics."

¹⁷D. W. B. Robinson, *Faith's Framework: The Structure of New Testament Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1985); *idem*, "Origins and Unresolved Tensions," in *Interpreting God's Plan*.

¹⁸W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984).

¹⁹See also Jer 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; 31:33; Ezek 11:20; 36:28; Zech 8:8; 2 Cor 6:16; Rev 21:3.

²⁰Exod 4:22-3; Hos 11:1.

²¹The inseparable nature of both salvation and judgment in the gospel is important. The obvious expression of this is the bringing of salvation through the judgment of sin on the cross. Consummatively, we see it in the focus on judgment alongside salvation in the Book of Revelation.

²²Hahn, "Kingdom and Church in Luke-Acts."