

## THE KINGDOM RESTORED

After the fall, making the world God's glorious kingdom would require a reversal of the curse and a renewal by grace. And that's exactly what God set out to do. The Bible is a rescue story, not about God rescuing sinners from a broken creation but about him rescuing them for a new creation. God's reign begins in the human heart, but it will one day extend to the ends of the earth. Many Christians today think of salvation as leaving earth for heaven, but the story of Scripture is quite the opposite. The message of the kingdom of God is not an escape from earth to heaven but God's reign coming from heaven to earth. The focus of God's reign is his people, but the scope of God's reign is all of creation (Jeremy Treat, *Seek First: How the Kingdom of God Changes Everything*).

*GENESIS 12:1-3* The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will  **bless**  you; I will make your name great, and you will be a  **blessing** . I will  **bless**  those who  **bless**  you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be  **blessed**  through you."

1. The creation story begins with humanity living and thriving under God's blessing. From Genesis 3 through 11, you begin to witness the devastating effects of the fall. The word curse occurs five times in these chapters. In Genesis 12:1-3 the word blessing occurs five times in three verses. How is God reversing the curse through Abraham?
2. What does God promise to do for Abraham?
3. What does God promise to do through Abraham?
4. How will the creation mandate be restored and fulfilled in Abraham?

## AN INVITATION FROM THE KING

*MATTHEW 11:29-30* 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

1. What is Christ's invitation to those who do not know him?
2. What is Christ's invitation to those who know him?



The heartbeat of Jesus' life and message was "the kingdom of God." In Mark's gospel the first words we hear from Jesus are, "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news! (Mark 1:15)."

In Matthew's gospel the word "kingdom" occurs fifty-four times in twenty-eight chapters. There is a lot more here than sheer quantity. The concept of kingdom shows up in some pretty significant places. Jesus opens the "Sermon on the Mount" with an invitation to enter into the blessing of the kingdom (5:3). The beatitudes describe the heart character of the people of the kingdom (5:3-12). The images of "salt" and "light" illustrate the impact of the kingdom (5:13-16). Jesus tells us that the kingdom involves the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets (vv. 17-19); and warns us, "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom (v. 20)." In chapter 6, he teaches us to pray, "Your kingdom come (6:9-10)," warns us "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, (6:19-20,)" and then challenges us, "But seek first his kingdom (6:33)."

Jesus not only emphasized the kingdom of God in his preaching and teaching, he demonstrated its power and presence in his miracles and acts of kindness."

So what does it mean to pray "your kingdom come," and to "seek the kingdom of God?" The New Testament never defines kingdom, it simply describes the kingdom and its impact. Jesus' initial hearers knew exactly what he was talking about, even if they were fuzzy on the details. They were immersed in the Old Testament story and lived in eager anticipation of the coming king and his kingdom—a kingdom that would change everything. So the place to begin is at the beginning.

Nothing should shape who we are, how we think and what we do more than our humble response to the King and wholehearted pursuit of his kingdom.

## THE KINGDOM DEFINED

GRAEME GOLDSWORTHY: God's rule over God's people in God's place (According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible)."

JEREMY TREAT: God's reign through God's people over God's place (Seek First: How the Kingdom of God Changes Everything).

1. There are three key concepts in these definitions—"God's Rule," "God's People," and "God's Place."
  - a. What are the various way God rules over his creation?
  - b. Who were God's people in the Old Testament?
  - c. Who are God's people in the New Testament?
  - d. What are the various places over which God rules or reigns at different times and in different ways?
2. In Graeme Goldsworthy's definition he emphasizes "God's rule over God's people." In Jeremy Treat's definition, he emphasizes "God's reign through God's people." Both concepts are important.
  - a. Why is it important to emphasize "God's rule over God's people?"
  - b. Why is it important to emphasize "God's reign through God's people?"

## THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

*GENESIS 1:26-28 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

1. How is the concept of God ruling through his people, over his place realized in the creation account?
2. These three verses are foundational to our understanding of who we are, how the world works, and how we fulfill God's purposes in the world. Some theologians refer to these verses as "The Creation Mandate." Here is a simple summary of the truths of these verses:

THE CREATION MANDATE: We were created to live and thrive under God's gracious rule (he blessed them), reflecting his heart and character (made in

his image and likeness) in the world as we steward his resources (fill, rule, subdue) for his glory and the common good.

- a. What does it mean to live and thrive under God's gracious rule?
- b. What does it mean to reflect his heart and character?
- c. What does it mean to steward his resources for his glory and the common good?

## THE KINGDOM LOST

*GENESIS 3:1-3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' " "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

1. What was the subtle (or not so subtle) whisper of the serpent?
2. How does he impugn the character of God?
3. What does he imply humanity would gain by charting their own course rather than living under the gracious rule of their creator?

*ROMANS 8:18-21 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

*JAMES 4:2-3 You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

4. How do Romans 8 and James 4 further characterize the impact of the fall?
5. If we were created to live and thrive under God's gracious rule, reflecting his character as we steward his resources for his glory and the common good, the fall exposed our tendency to stumble alone under our own rule, reflecting the heart and culture of the world around us, consuming as many resources as we can accumulate for our own status, prestige and comfort. How does the fall turn every aspect of the creation mandate on its head?