



“Understanding the Bible”

Section 3: What is the Message of the Bible?



Unit 3.6 – Finding the Keys to God’s Kingdom

I) Connecting the Kingdom Dots

- Now that we have reached our final unit in Section 3, let’s take one final look at the message of the Bible by drawing our attention to another unifying theme: **The Kingdom of God**. This concept of God’s Kingdom is something that is first presented to us with the arrival of Adam and Eve, and it continues to develop until Scripture’s final scene of a restored humanity on a restored earth under God’s reign in the book of Revelation. But before we start to address the concept of God’s Kingdom, we need to define our terms. In his book, *Gospel and Kingdom*, author Graeme Goldsworthy gives us a very helpful three-fold definition of what this Kingdom of God really is. Goldsworthy says, “*The kingdom of God is... (1) God’s people (2) in God’s place (3) under God’s rule and blessing.*” Based on this concise definition, we will take our final walk through the full breadth of God’s Word to see how these three areas are presented, how they change, and how they are restored upon the second coming of Jesus Christ.

II) Getting a Peek at Perfection

- When we first open the Bible, we read about the creation of human beings. Right after this creation account, we get our first glance of these creatures bearing the image of God, tending the unblemished Garden of Eden, and enjoying God’s sweet presence and divine blessing. **Genesis 2:8-9** tells us, *“⁸And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”* This reveals to us that God placed mankind in a garden to dwell with Him, have dominion over His creation, and receive His blessing as long as they remained under His rule. This Garden of Eden was a place of paradise and perfection. Mankind was free of disease, death, and separation from God and each other. They had everything they could possibly need, supplied directly from the hand of God. Adam and Eve’s only responsibility was to obey God, and if they remained obedient to God’s commands they would always enjoy God’s blessings and presence.

III) Dealing with Trouble in Paradise

- As we encounter the third chapter of Genesis, however, we get a front row seat to witness mankind’s first sign of trouble in paradise. Satan slithers into the garden as a sly serpent who convinces Adam and Eve to eat forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This one act of mankind’s disobedience brought sin into the world. Sin brought with it the wages of death and separation from God for all of humanity. But what is often overlooked through this account of the Fall is this: Sin compromised the establishment of God’s Kingdom by attempting to establish man’s kingdom. When human beings made the choice to reject God’s rule, they were instantly shameful for their sinful choice and could no longer find peace in the presence of a Holy God. **Genesis 3:8** reveals, *“⁸And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”* Adam and Eve ate from the tree simply because they wanted to seek their own wisdom build their own kingdom in the garden. When they did this, they immediately realized the grave mistake in rejecting God’s Kingdom for their own and they were remorseful. Their consequence for this decision was to be removed from the garden and forced to live in separation from the abiding presence of their Creator. God’s plan for establishing His Kingdom was interrupted, but as the story continues we see that God had a greater plan from the very beginning to establish a kingdom that would last forever.

IV) Pointing to a Covenant Promise

- To begin a new process of establishing His kingdom, God decided to choose a righteous man and build a righteous nation to be a witness to an unrighteous world. God decided to choose Abram to be the father of this new nation, and just like Adam, God promised Abram many blessings through a covenant agreement that required him to be obedient to God's rule. **Genesis 17:1-2** says, *"When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.'*" Although Abram was not a perfect man, he had faith in God's promises and had a desire to live under God's rule. This is why God changed his name to Abraham and eventually established him as the patriarch of the holy nation of Israel.

V) Calling Out a Chosen Nation

- When God began re-establishing His kingdom after the Fall, He chose one man (Abraham) to build one nation (Israel) so He could bring one Son (Jesus Christ) into the world to redeem it and restore it. The borders of Israel were never intended to be the end of God's Kingdom but the very beginning. Through the Israelites, God would call unto Himself a group of people who would live life completely under His rule. The Lord said to Israel in **Exodus 6:7**, *"⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."* God would be their God by traveling with them by a pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13), showering down manna from heaven to feed them (Exodus 16), giving them a holy law to live in obedience to (Exodus 20), dwelling in their presence daily through a tabernacle (Exodus 26), and establishing a Levitical priesthood to carry out these holy laws while making sacrifices of atonement when they sinned. The Israelites were not expected to be perfect, but they were called to be faithful.

VI) Providing a Clearer Picture

- Israel's repeated unfaithfulness was proof that mankind needed a savior to keep God's kingdom commandments. As God first establishes a covenant through Abraham to build a nation with a law written on stone tablets, God later speaks through the prophet Jeremiah and states that He has a new covenant in mind where the law will be written on man's heart (Jeremiah 31:33). This idea of a new covenant written on mankind's heart is also mentioned through other prophets of the Old Testament. In **Ezekiel 36:26-27** we read this same promise from God to His people: *"²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*" This prophecy brings the Kingdom of God into clearer focus. Mankind could not live in obedience to His rule through sinful human effort, so God soon decides to send His Son to fulfill the law and His Spirit to empower redeemed humanity to live in obedient faith.

VII) Announcing the Kingdom's Arrival

- When we turn to the gospels in the New Testament, we see that the Kingdom of God has finally arrived in the person of Jesus Christ. In **Mark 1:15** Jesus boldly proclaims, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* The concept of God's Kingdom is the focal point of Christ's teaching during His three-year earthly ministry. Christ finally reveals to Peter and His apostles that the final stage in establishing His Kingdom will be through what He calls His "Church" (Matthew 16:19). Jesus gives the keys to this kingdom to the apostles to begin establishing the church through their divinely-inspired miracles and teachings, which would eventually become the final chapters of Holy Scripture.

VIII) Revealing a Full Restoration

- As we reach the final scene of Holy Scripture, we see a picture of God's Kingdom fully restored and fully established. As it says in **Revelation 21:3** *"...Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."* God's people are finally back in God's place and under God's perfect rule. This Kingdom is perfected through Christ, is built through the Church, and is completed in the New Heavens and New Earth.