



18 LESSON CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Lesson 6

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

When Jesus began to preach to the Jews, long before his crucifixion, we read that he preached the good news of the Kingdom of God (Luke 8:1). It was therefore something that his hearers could understand, before they knew anything at all about his sacrificial death. When he taught his disciples to pray, the coming of the Kingdom of God is one of the first requests:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9,10).

What then is the Kingdom of God? Many people who call themselves Christians have little real idea what these words mean. But if it is given a place of such importance by the Lord Jesus, in his preaching and in his prayer, it must also be very important that we understand what we are praying for. The answer is in the prayer itself: “Your will be done on earth”, as it is now done in heaven. When the Kingdom of God comes, the will of God will be done, and will be seen to be done, on this earth. And if we have to pray for it, it certainly has not come yet. It will and must come, but only God has the power to get it established.

The Kingdom of God in the past

A kingdom requires a king, a people, a land and a set of laws. It is important first of all to understand that the Kingdom of God has already existed in the past. The coming Kingdom will in fact not be something entirely new, but an old kingdom, re-established. In order to make this important point clear we have to go back to what we said in Lesson 5. When the Israelites left Egypt, they escaped across the Red Sea and came to Mount Sinai in Arabia. There God made a solemn agreement with them, and gave them a set of laws. Later he brought them into the land of Canaan, as it was then called. So there was a people, there were laws, there was a land.

There was also a King—God himself. This can be shown from an incident which happened much later. There came a time when the Israelites wanted a king who would be like the kings of the nations round about them—someone whom they could see, and who would lead them into battle. So they came to Samuel, who was acting as a judge and guide to the people at that time, and made their request:

“Appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.” (1 Samuel 8:5).

Samuel was displeased, feeling himself rejected, and came to God in prayer. God said to him, “It is not you they have rejected as their king, but me,” and he commanded Samuel to do as they asked. It was then that Saul became king over Israel.

So ever since they had come into their land, God had been their king. He had constantly watched over them and given them victory over their enemies. But because He was invisible, his people needed to have faith that He was indeed near to them. It was this lack of faith which was the cause of the ultimate downfall of the nation.

We see, then, that the Kingdom of God existed in those far-off days. David followed Saul as king and after him his son Solomon.

After Solomon’s death, the kingdom was divided into two, a northern part which was given the name Israel and a southern part known as Judah. The kings of Israel were all idolatrous, and after about three hundred years this northern kingdom was conquered by Assyria. In Judah, though some kings, such as Hezekiah, had faith in God and tried to preserve the true religion. But the people sank further and further into heathen ways. Finally, as God had warned, Judah was taken into captivity, into Babylon, which had risen to power after the sudden collapse of the Assyrian empire.

The Kingdom of God re-established

The last king to reign on the 'throne of the Lord' was Zedekiah, and to him came a message from God, a prophecy that the kingdom would be overthrown, but not for ever. Another king would come, who under God would re-establish the kingdom:

"O profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax . . . Take off the turban, remove the crown . . . I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to him will I give it" (Ezekiel 21:25-27).

Who is this, to whom the throne rightfully belongs? None other than the Lord Jesus Christ! This is one of the most important links between the Old and New Testaments. We turn now to the gospel of Luke, to the moment when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said she would bear a son, who would be the Son of God:

"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:31-33).

The Kingdom of God is to be established again on the earth, following the return of Jesus from heaven. The world will have a King who will be all-powerful, whom all the earth will obey, a king who will be able to bring peace at last to this troubled world. It is useless to hope that the governments of this world can bring peace; only Jesus can do this. This coming kingdom will be the ancient kingdom of Israel restored.

When we understand this, we can see the true significance of the question which the disciples put to Jesus shortly before he left them to go into heaven:

"He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God . . . So when they met together, they asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

We can see now why Paul, arriving in Rome as a prisoner, could say to the Jews:

"It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain." (Acts 28:20)

The Kingdom of God which he preached was also the 'hope of Israel'. The Kingdom of God for which Christians must pray will not be a kingdom in heaven, or a state of mind in the believers; it will be the ancient Kingdom of Israel restored upon the ruins of all existing kingdoms.

The prophet Daniel saw a vision, in which the kingdoms of this world were represented by an image of a man, made of various metals, with feet partly of baked clay and partly of iron. The image was destroyed by a stone, which became a huge mountain and filled the earth. The interpretation of the vision was revealed to Daniel as follows:

"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed . . . It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever." (Daniel 2:44)

With this additional background it will be helpful now for you to read again Lesson 1. In our next lesson we shall learn about the connection between the coming Kingdom of God and our personal salvation; about our sin, and the need for repentance.

Summary

The Kingdom of God for which we must pray will be an earthly kingdom, the ancient Kingdom of Israel restored under the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ at his return. It will replace all existing kingdoms.

Questions

F1 Has there been a Kingdom of God upon the earth before?

F2 Will the future Kingdom of God be an earthly Kingdom? Who will be its King?