

# THE KINGDOM REVEALED IN THE PROPHETS (EXPANDED)

## PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read passages about God's promises to establish his kingdom on earth, including Isa 2:1-5; 11; 25; 65:17-25; Jer 33:14-26; Ezek 36; Dan 2, 7; Amos 9:11-15; Joel 3; Zeph 3; Hag 2; Zech 8; 14; Mal 4. What do these mean? What is the time of their fulfillment?

## WHAT IS THE KINGDOM?

The kingdom is God's rule over the earth and its people through his Messiah. The kingdom consists of a ruler, a reign, and a realm. Our expectation for the future fulfillment of this is based on the past fulfillment: **Adam** was a physically present ruler exercising dominion (reign) over the earth (realm). **David** was a physically present ruler exercising dominion over the nation of Israel. The kingdom does not now exist, as **Jesus** is not physically present on earth and he is not exercising his reign over any portion of this earth. While he has subjects who are submitted to him, this is insufficient to constitute a fulfillment of the promises in Scripture of God's kingdom on earth.

## THE KINGDOM AND THE COVENANTS

The hope of the prophets was based in the conviction that God would re-establish Eden on earth as promised in the **Abrahamic covenant** of blessings to all people (Gen 12, 15, 17, 22) and the **Davidic covenant** of a righteous son of David ruling over God's kingdom forever providing the people with lasting peace (2 Sam 7). David himself knew that he was not this righteous ruler, and he wrote **psalms** about this king and his glorious kingdom. In the kingdom, the Lord's Messiah would rule forever, the enemies would be subdued, the weak would be delivered, all the earth would be subject to God, and the land would flourish (Ps 2, 8, 45, 47, 72, 110).

## GENESIS 1-2: GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH

The kingdom is not called such in **Genesis 1-2**. The "kingdom" is simply creation as God intended it. Thus there are no prophecies or looking forward to anything better, because the best thing existed. But after the Fall, the hope of all righteous people will be a return to the situation in the Garden of Eden: God dwelling in fellowship with his people who rule over a good creation that is not under the Curse.

## THE PENTATEUCH: THE FIRST KINGDOM PROMISES

Through the **Pentateuch**, the hopes for the kingdom anticipate the settlement of Israel in the land promised to Abraham. God's people are not looking beyond that time for they expect that the conquest of Canaan will result in the fulfillment of all of God's promises. God had promised to make Abraham's descendants numerous (Gen 15:5), to give them the land of Canaan with kings ruling over it (Gen 17:6-8), and to provide a seed (a single descendant) through whom all nations on earth would be blessed (Gen 22:18). Judah would be the tribe of kings until one would come who deserved the throne and the obedience of nations (Gen 49:10). He would rule in idyllic conditions of peace and prosperity (Gen 49:11-12). In this kingdom, God would dwell with his people in the tabernacle (Exod 40). The enemies of God would be defeated by Israel's great king who would live in obedience to God's Word (Num 24:17-19).

## JOSHUA, DAVID, AND SOLOMON: GOD'S KINGDOM UNREALIZED

When God brought Israel into the land of Canaan under **Joshua's** leadership, there was the expectation that God would restore the kingdom and the promises would be fulfilled. Indeed, many promises were

fulfilled, for the nation had increased in number and were living in a land where they had once been strangers. But the kingdom didn't come (= Eden wasn't restored; =the promises weren't all fulfilled) because the people were not faithful to God: they failed to subdue the land from the remaining Canaanites and they began to worship idols (Judg 1-2). One cause of the failure was the lack of righteous leadership and so God provided Saul and then David. But even **David** failed to obey God's Word and so the glorious kingdom that Solomon inherited was soon a fading glimmer. God now lived among his people in the magnificent temple, but the king led the nation in worshipping false gods (1 Kgs 11).

#### AMOS: JUDGMENT AND HOPE

With the **division of the kingdom** and the increasing waywardness of the people, the **prophets** began to predict the nation's exile. But it is important to note that with predictions of exile came predictions of a glorious future era. **Amos** knew the people were guilty of gross sin, but he knew that the faithfulness of God would overcome that and restore the people to a land which would be abundantly prosperous and a blessing to all nations (Amos 9:11-15).

#### MICAH AND ISAIAH: MT. ZION DESTROYED AND EXALTED

After Amos, two other **8th-century prophets** expand on the kingdom promises. **Micah** looks forward to a righteous king shepherding God's flock in security over all the earth while many nations journey to Jerusalem to learn at the temple (Micah 4-5).

**Isaiah's** message of Israel's sin and certain exile is accompanied with glorious promises of the future king and his kingdom. David's son will rule in righteousness (9) over a land in which the curse is removed and the earth is as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is full of water (11). The poor and needy will find refuge and a rich banquet with the finest of foods. Death will be swallowed up, tears will be wiped away, and disgrace will be removed (25). The dead will be raised, the wicked will be judged, idolatry will cease, and Israel will fill the world with fruit (26-27). The king will reign in righteousness, the Spirit will be poured out from on high, and the people will live in blissful peace (32). The people will see the king in his beauty and their sins will be forgiven (33). The desert will burst forth with life, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, and the ransomed will enter Zion with everlasting joy (35). After the death and resurrection of the Servant (53), the people will be restored to their land and experience the everlasting compassion of God, living in a city built with precious stones (54). The kingdom will be open to foreigners and outcasts who submit to the Lord (56). The wealth of the world will pour into Jerusalem, the gates of the city will never be shut, and God himself will replace the sun and moon (60). Righteous Israel will be the praise of the earth and the Lord will delight in his people (62). God will create a new heavens and a new earth in which the one who dies at 100 will be considered a mere youth (65-66).

#### JOEL AND ZEPHANIAH: THE DAY OF THE LORD

The longing for the kingdom continues with the **7th-century prophets** who are now anticipating imminent exile to Babylon. **Joel** graphically describes the Day of the Lord and calls the nation to repent so that the enemies will be driven away, the harvest will be restored, and the people will know that the Lord is God (Joel 2). God will judge the nations who fight against him but be a refuge for those who seek him. Judah will be inhabited forever and Judah's bloodguilt will be pardoned (Joel 3). **Zephaniah** also emphasizes the coming Day of the Lord as incentive to seek the Lord and be protected from his anger when he pours it out on the nations. At that time God will restore the exiles, forgive his people, live among them, and take delight in his people.

## OBADIAH, JEREMIAH, AND EZEKIEL: RESTORATION TO THE LAND

Three prophets provide hope in the days of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians. **Obadiah** gives the short version: those who have cursed Israel will themselves be cursed and God's people will return to inhabit their land and that of their enemies. **Jeremiah's** message is largely one of condemnation as he declares the nation's sin that is worthy of exile. He sounds three notes of hope: (1) the exile will last 70 years (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10); (2) God will raise up a "righteous Branch," that is, a king who will reign wisely and be called "The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer 23:5-6); (3) the Old Covenant that the Israelites failed to keep would be replaced by the New Covenant (Jer 30-33).

Because **Ezekiel's** message is directed to those already in Babylon in exile (upon whom judgment had already come), it contains a large dose of hope. The land that was lost will be regained. The people who were deported will be re-gathered. The temple that was destroyed will be rebuilt. God promises to shepherd his people and to provide for them a shepherd, God's servant David (Ezek 33:23-24). God will give his people a new heart and put his Spirit within them (Ezek 36:26-27). The twelve tribes will be reunited and will live under one king with God dwelling with them forever (Ezek 37). The extraordinary detail of the new temple, the restored priesthood, the re-apportioned land, and the transformed earth (fish in the Dead Sea!) requires that these prophecies be fulfilled in a literal manner (Ezek 40-48).

### DANIEL: THE TIMING OF THE KINGDOM

**Daniel** addresses the nation that is in exile and longing for return. His particular contribution is with regard to the *timing* of God's kingdom, first revealing that four kingdoms would precede the establishment of God's kingdom. Before the exile, the Israelites expected that God would establish his kingdom on earth at any time with a righteous ruler from the house of David. Then they expected that God would establish the kingdom after the 70 years of exile. But God revealed through Daniel that the exile would last not 70 years but 70 sevens of years (weeks of years). Thus we have two chronological markers for the coming of God's kingdom: after the fourth kingdom (Dan 2, 7) and at the end of 70 sevens (Dan 9).

### RELATED STUDIES

Future studies are necessary to fill in and add new details. (1) Next week we will study the **New Covenant** and its role in the kingdom. (2) The following week we will study the **post-exilic period** (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) and prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) to see how they explain why God's kingdom did not arrive after the 70 years of exile in Babylon. Then we will see how John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles speak about God's coming kingdom.

### GOING FURTHER

As you re-read the prophets, consider whether it seems possible that God's promises would not be fulfilled to Israel. Is it possible that they could be fulfilled to the church instead?

### PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Jeremiah 30-33 and think carefully about what the New Covenant is and is not. Do not allow the New Testament to influence your thinking at this point.