

PostExilicProphets 22-02-16b

Let's pick up our study now in the book of Zechariah, and we have come to a good place to take a somewhat formal look at the notion of the kingdom, God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, kingdom of the son, kingdom of the father, spiritual kingdom, kingdom of the son, of his love, it is referred to, and the notion of a kingdom and the kingdom is throughout scripture. When you begin looking at the subject, there is a truckload of scriptural references on this subject, and yet in my humble opinion, it is probably one of the least understood principles, least understood areas of truth in all of scripture. I want to preface this by asking a question, which is one of my favorite questions, so what? Here we are, we're largely Americans, largely living in America, trying to make it through our day.

We are believers. We recognize our spiritual identity. We understand our future hope.

We are headed somewhere into the realms of glory with some kind of relationship to God in a resurrected and glorified state, in some kind of an economy. We are pretty sure that there are going to be two phases of this, one presided over by the Lord Jesus Christ that will last a thousand years, and the one that is beyond that and is eternal that is presided over by the Father and the Son, and its capital is the New Jerusalem. All of this, we've got a pretty firm grip on, and we know that we are here in anticipation of those future realities.

We are either going to be translated at the rapture or resurrected at the rapture and play some role, have some place in the hereafter. So why don't we just kind of wait and see, and we'll find out when we get there what it is. Actually, I'm going to suggest that there is a degree of merit in that approach.

Why would that be? There can be so much angst and concern and study and argumentation and publication and refutation and oppositional debate about what is the kingdom, what form will it take, how long will it last, how real and material is it, and particularly for people who get wrapped up in some version of kingdom now, looking at the words of Jesus in English, and when he says, the kingdom of God is within you, and saying, it's here now, this is the kingdom. We are kingdom people. We have a kingdom agenda and King Jesus and king this, kingdom that.

And looking at the form and structure of the kingdom, I would like to offer you a thought at the beginning because we are going to go through what possibilities there are in terms of interpretation and what I think and what many wiser and grander interpreters than I think is the reality. But I want to begin and close with this thought. The most essential truth regarding the kingdom of God in general, the kingdom of the Son, kingdom of the Father in particular, is not the exact nature, shape, structure, time, and detailed features of that kingdom.

The most important feature is the kind of person we become in the light of that expectation. Let me draw a quick analogy. When we're in school, elementary, junior high, even high school, a lot

of times we don't know what the future holds.

Am I going to have this vocation or this profession? Am I going to go on to this graduate or postgraduate degree? Am I going to be blue collar, white collar? Will I be married early or late? Will I, as a lady, start out and maybe have ambition? Of getting into a field, but then I may end up being a housewife and raising children. And that'll be my primary focus. I really don't know.

It's amorphous. It's unclear. It's beyond the range of my headlights.

I can't know. And I think most of us looking back on our lives, however old we are, find ourselves currently in at least some parts of our lives in unanticipated circumstances. I really didn't know I would be doing this at this point, in this place, with these people at this time.

Didn't see it coming because we don't have a crystal ball. We don't have knowledge of the future. So what did we do not knowing what the future would hold? We do general preparation.

I need a reasonably good grasp of communication skills. I should be able to read and write proficiently in my native language as a start. I should have a reasonable grasp of mathematics so that I can balance a checkbook.

I can figure a tip. I can go to the store and decide whether or not I'm being overcharged, whether I've got more month than I've got money, budgeting, calculating what my monthly burden is going to be if I take on a mortgage, if I take on consumer debt. I need a reasonable grasp of mathematics.

I need to have the basics of being able to work with money and hopefully measure a room and figure out how much carpet I need and so on. We need a reasonable grasp of economics. I live in a world that is defined by commerce and trade and what constitutes taxes.

I need to understand imported goods and tariffs and have just a general knowledge so that I can understand the larger context of my country and amongst the countries of the world. I need some understanding of government. I'm going to be called upon to vote.

How does this work? How many branches of government are they? What is their function? How do they interact? What is my role in a representative democracy? You see my point. We want to be generally educated in the basics that we can use as a foundation to build on in any future specific or more specific area of endeavor. I may start out with a general knowledge and I suddenly find myself on an engineering track or working with mechanical things where some of my mathematical skills really get put into application and working formulas and determining densities and weights and stresses.

And I may need to read manuals and it's a good thing I have a grasp of language and I know how to look up words that I don't understand and see the application of terms. But we begin with a general base that is a body of truth that is a foundation to build on in whatever future area we find ourselves. It is a direct and helpful analogy to our spiritual life.

We know that there is a future and it involves service and function with the Lord Jesus in a kingdom that is going to have a government, is going to have a justice system, is going to have an economy, is going to have international relations. And much of the things that we see in the existing world have their analog in the millennial kingdom and beyond. In the same way that we prepare with general skills for this life and what we can reasonably expect to encounter in the short-term future, we want to develop in spiritual terms.

What will the foundational assumptions and moral and ethical truths be in a future kingdom? They are defined by the king. They are embodied in the king. He is the truth.

He is the way. He is the life. And as we come to understand him and his teaching and the teachings of those apostles that he appointed to the church, he gave some apostles and prophets and pastors and teachers to build up the church so that we could be mutually edified, so that we could function in unity as a body, each part doing its work, each part respecting the functions of the other parts that are different but important, whether they seem presentable or they seem hidden and out of sight, the whole body fitly joined together by that which every joint supplies, giving directionality, applying leverage and strength.

And we grow to the standard of a mature man. I'm loosely paraphrasing what you find in Ephesians. So we don't have to focus so much on, do I understand every detail of the kingdom or have I even figured out exactly what the kingdom is? Is it kingdom now, kingdom later? If I become a person that is thoroughly equipped for every good work, then whatever the kingdom turns out to be, just like whatever our life turns out to be, I will be equipped.

I will have skills. I will have knowledge. I will have experience.

And I will have the tools to improvise, adapt and overcome and be an overcomer. It is not necessary for us to know the future before it gets here, but it is necessary for us to be prepared people. And in that regard, you can have a kingdom now notion and be invested in a lot of we will build it and he will come type of thinking.

That is not necessarily a fatal flaw. And I wouldn't try to tackle somebody and beat that notion out of their head if they think it's kingdom now. I am sure that it is not from scripture.

But if that person in the sphere of their kingdom expectation, if they think that it is here and it is now, but they are endeavoring in that light to become and forgive the term kingdom people, people who are equipped to function and act according to the principles of the king, God go with you. You may have your paradigm wrong, but if you're gaining skills because of what your understanding of the paradigm is, okay, the important thing is what we individually become in Christ. As we look to the future, growing in grace and knowledge of the savior, being thoroughly equipped for every good work, having the word of God for doctrine, rebuke, correction and instruction so that we can become mature and be ready to do the good works that God has for ordained that we should walk in them.

Your understanding can be off. Your expectation can be off. Your eschatology can be off.

The measure is not, did I get the details of the nature and duration of the millennial kingdom exactly right? Did I figure out the timing of the rapture? Did I figure out the nature of the second coming? Did I figure out how literal these various passages are? There's not going to be an eschatology test at the rapture that is going to get graded by some angel sitting on a cloud. The test is going to be how well-equipped am I? What is in my soul? Do I love God? Do I love one another? And there is a sense in which there can be any variety of understandings that are variously closer or further away from the actual literal truth of scripture. And that is not as important.

In the same way that your denomination, your, the church that you attend and what it formally holds to and what its creed or its doctrinal statement says is not as important as the day by day, week by week growth in knowledge and understanding in that congregation under that teaching is. That's what counts. I don't really care to quibble with somebody who has various views.

I am more interested in, are we traveling the narrow road on that upward hill through the straight gate that leads to life? There are essentials and there are non-essentials. I just want to lead with that because we are now going to talk about the wide variety of understandings. You cannot believe how various this is.

And it tells us that it takes some effort to get these understandings right. I'm going to appeal to J. Dwight Pentecost and one of my favorite all times books, Things to Come. I had the dust jacket.

I still have the dust jacket, but it's so tattered. I'm embarrassed to show it to you. So I took it off, but I want to begin with well into the book in section six.

He's got chapter 25 entitled Prophecies of the Millennium. Section six is Prophecies of the Millennium. That's what we have here in Zachariah, Prophecies of the Millennium.

And chapter 25 is titled The Kingdom Concept in the Old Testament. Directly pertinent to what we're looking at. Here's what Dr. Pentecost says.

God's kingdom program occupies a large body of scripture. But in spite of all that the scripture has to say on this subject, one is faced with a great variety of interpretations and explanations as to the nature and purpose of the kingdom program of God. Now, Dr. Pentecost said this way back.

When was this thing published? 1958. And believe me, it has done nothing but proliferate since that time. 58, what is that? 64 years ago? It's an understatement now.

To some, the kingdom of God is synonymous with the eternal state or heaven into which one comes after death so that it has no relationship to the earth whatsoever. It's all totally future up

in heaven. To others, it is a non-material or spiritual kingdom in which God rules over the hearts of men so that while it is related to the present age, it is unrelated to the earth.

To still others, the kingdom is purely earthly without spiritual realities attached to it so that it is a political and social structure to be achieved by the efforts of men and thus becomes the goal of a social and economic evolution to which men press. To others, with the same general concept, it has to do with a nationalistic movement on the part of Israel that will reconstitute that nation as an independent nation in the political realm. Then there are those who view the kingdom as synonymous with the visible organized church so that the church becomes the kingdom, thus making the kingdom both spiritual and political.

In addition, there are those who view the kingdom as the manifestation in the earthly realm of the universal sovereignty of God in which he rules the affairs of men so that the kingdom is conceived as being both spiritual and material in its concept. Are you with me so far? Through this maze of interpretations, it is almost impossible to make one's way. And I say, amen.

The truth related to the kingdom will not be derived by an examination of the writings of men, but rather only by an inductive study of the teaching of the word of God on this great subject. So he begins at page 428, and he's going to go for about almost 200 pages doing just that. I want to move forward a little bit.

I'm going to skip quite a bit and move to a section about 20 pages beyond that where he is talking about the kingdom in various phases of the Old Testament. Remember chapter 25 is the kingdom and the prophets. And so he talks about it in various stages of Old Testament history.

And you get to section D, it's the theocratic kingdom under the judges. E, you get to the theocratic kingdom under the kings. I am coming forward to section F, which is the theocratic kingdom under the prophets, because we are looking at the prophet Zechariah along with Haggai and Malachi.

Zechariah, by far the most prolific of these authors. And he is talking about the theocratic kingdom. Why does he say theocratic? Well, if you say kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven, there are people who try to make those into technical terms.

So the kingdom of heaven, we look at in the future when there is a new heaven and a new earth. Theocratic kingdom is what Dr. Pentecost is going to use to designate a kingdom, the kingdom on this earth. God's rule in and on the earth.

So theocratic, it's a theocracy. So section F, the theocratic kingdom under the prophets. Now this I hope will be helpful.

Keep in mind my introduction now, where we want to be people that are prepared to serve and function and be useful in God's theocratic kingdom. You can see historical adumbrations and things in the first five sections here, A, B, C, D, and E. But F is what I'm interested in. Under the prophets, with the decline of the nation, under the kings who succeeded Solomon, the last

divinely appointed ruler.

Remember this, no anointed kings after Solomon. There's no further anointing. We find the rise in importance in the prophetic office.

The prophets were the divinely appointed spokesmen for God who relayed God's message to the kings who sometimes obeyed, but with greater frequency did not. An author named Peters says, quote, "'King and priest were to yield to the authority of the prophet simply because the prophet directly revealed the will of the supreme king.'" Capital S, capital K. So king and priest were to yield to the authority of the prophet because the prophet is speaking for God and answering to him. "'The prophet Ezekiel traces the departure of the Shekinah glory, which in the Old Testament was a symbol of the presence of God, with the departure of the Shekinah glory from the temple.'" And we've seen this.

You remember the progress. We mapped it when we were in Ezekiel. And if you want to write these down real quick, Ezekiel 8, 4, Ezekiel 9, 3, Ezekiel 10, 4, 10, 18, and then 11, 22 to 23.

Once again, the tracking of the departure of the glory of God from the Holy of Holies eastward and over the Mount of Olives, Ezekiel 8, 4, 9, 3, 10, 4, 10, 18, and 11, 22 and 23. "'God marks the close of the theocratic kingdom in Israel's past history, and the nation and the kings that were to have manifested that kingdom are scattered out of the land. The times of the Gentiles began, in which Israel is set aside until Messiah should come.'" It isn't interesting to think about that symmetry where God begins with his presence, and he is Israel's king, really beginning in the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But certainly once Moses takes the people out of Egypt, and you have the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, then you have the tabernacle, you have the glory in the tabernacle, extending all the way down with some rough spots through the days of the judges to the monarchy, to David, to Solomon, to the temple. God's glory fills that temple. But then by 721, some 300 years after David, the Northern kingdom goes out, and in 586, the Southern kingdom goes out.

And from that time, you have really the rise and reign and rule of the prophets. And there is no more monarchy, there is no more temple per se, there's the hollow building, but God's not there. And you have the times of the Gentiles where Israel is overseen by the Babylonians, by the Medes and Persians, by the Greeks, and then by the Romans, and they're never independent, they no longer have a king on the throne.

And it is the times of the Gentiles, much as the Lord Jesus comes, and they have the opportunity for that monarchy to be restored, for the kingdom to be established and invoked, but there is rejection. And it is in a nutshell, what happened earlier on in their history, the rejection of the law of Moses, rejection of the rule of God, and give us a king, and the decline. Well, you have that in miniature form with the coming of the Lord Jesus.

And then once again, you have a much longer period of the times of the Gentiles. Times of the

Gentiles lasts about 600 years, depending on how you measure it, six to 800 years, almost a thousand years, if you start from Solomon down to Christ. Times of the Gentiles, increasing domination of Gentiles and diminution of God's people.

And now we've had 2000 years of the times of the Gentiles after the second opportunity to have a monarchy under God. So this is that to which Dr. Pentecost alludes here. The times of the Gentiles, quote unquote, began in which Israel has set aside until Messiah should come.

The future theocratic kingdom now becomes the major theme of the prophet's message. That line of revelation, which began as a small stream, now becomes a great river, flooding the word with knowledge concerning the kingdom to be established in its final form. It is referred to by nearly every Old Testament prophet.

And he gives an entire paragraph of nothing but references. Isaiah two, one through four, and there's line after line after line after line. It's a paragraph about two and a half inches long of nothing but references from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, including our passage 14, one through 21, and then Malachi.

In addition, it is referred to frequently in the Psalms and he gives almost two lines of references in the Psalms. While these and other prophecies will be studied in detail later to develop the full doctrine of the kingdom, certain facts concerning the prophetic anticipation of the theocratic kingdom may be observed here. This is what we're getting to.

This is what I've been after now. What do the prophets have to say that is useful to us? Because what they say about the kingdom is useful to us so that we can identify that foundation, that set of basic skills that will prepare us for whatever that kingdom holds. When you're a kid, you realize that there are stores and there's government and there's stop signs and there's a military, and you begin to grasp that there are bigger pieces moving around in the world and that what I am learning in school is going to help me enter that world and function effectively in it.

By looking at what the prophets have to say about the coming kingdom of God or kingdoms of God, we can get that same sense and begin to realize how important our preparation is personally, individually, spiritually for the things that that kingdom will entail. So, Schaeffer, Lewis Barry Schaeffer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, summarizes the teaching showing that the kingdom is. Now, why are we listening to this? What is our takeaway? Tomorrow, when I wake up in the morning and I start doing my tasks and getting on with my day, meeting my requirements, crossing my I's and dotting my T's, what can I be thinking about from all of this? This life is not the objective.

This isn't the goal. Succeeding here is not the be all and end all any more than you wanna go dig up your sixth grade report card and say, look at those A's, if you got any. Let me get my eighth grade report card.

Look, I studied geography. I did really well in that class. That's not the goal of school, is it? What am I using now? What part of that preparation was helpful? It was the means to an end.

Think about any training course you've ever been in or may be in at present. It gives you skills. It teaches you things that you are now using in the present day.

What we're about to read regarding the nature of the kingdom is a clue. It's a heads up. This is what I need to be paying attention to when I listen to the news, when I go into the workplace, when I'm receiving whatever training and input, when I'm wading through social media, when I'm in conversation with others, when I am in Bible class, when I'm reviewing the things that I see in the word of God, when I'm doing my Bible reading and my personal devotionals, what should I be focusing on and making sure I have a good grip on because this is the coming future.

It's not just, can I have a happy day today? Can I think happy thoughts? Am I getting prepared for what I must know and must do when this kingdom comes? Well, it's helpful to know a little bit about what that kingdom is and what it does. So, Schaeffer summarizes the teaching showing that the kingdom is A, going to be theocratic. The king will be Emmanuel, God with us.

He is by human birth, a rightful heir to David's throne, born of a virgin in Bethlehem. Isaiah 7, 14, Matthew 1, 22 and 23 gives a whole string of references here. So, it is going to be a theocracy.

God in Christ will be ruling. So, helpful to know what his likes and dislikes are, what his objectives and goals and purposes are because he's going to be the king. B, it is going to be heavenly in character.

It gives some references for that. Isaiah 2, 4 and Isaiah 11, 4 and 5 and so on. C, this kingdom is going to be both in Jerusalem, centered in Jerusalem and worldwide.

Emmanuel's kingdom will be in the earth, gives a string of references for that. Second, it will be centered in Jerusalem, string of references for that. It will be over regathered and converted Israel.

When it says regathered and converted, they are regathered, but the converted are the ones who go in. The recalcitrant stiff-necked are not going to be converted. Israel as a nation will be constituted of the converted in the same way that the useful and effective body of Christ, whether it's riding white horses and accompanying him at the battle of Armageddon in Revelation 19, or whether it is serving and functioning in useful capacities during the millennial kingdom and citizenship and service and function in the kingdom of the father beyond.

We determine that now, we don't get converted to it later. My only quibble with Dr. Schaffer is, God is not going to change the minds of Israelites. He is going to compose millennial Israel of those who changed their minds in this life.

And that is an important lesson for us. What are my priorities right now? Am I giving a nod to God or am I invested and investing my time in the plan and purpose of God? And if I'm not doing it as under the Lord, it's not worth doing and I need to quit doing it. I need to find those things that I can do as under the Lord.

If it's a distraction, if it's a deflection, if it's just a waste of time for self-gratification, or if people are wasting my time by distracting me and deflecting me and click baiting me or whatever it might be, cut it out. Time is precious. It is the mina that we have been given by the master.

And hopefully we can turn that mina, we can invest it and make 10 minas or five minas, but we don't haul it off and do nothing with it. Look at that parable of the minas. I think it's Luke chapter 19.

Boy, that's a scary one. So this is going to be the millennial kingdom. It is going to be theocratic.

It is going to be heavenly in its character, but it's going to be earthly in its presence. Fourthly, it will be established by the returning king. And fifthly, it will be spiritual.

It is not just a literal physical manifestation and fulfillment of millennial prophecies, but it is not incorporeal or separate from that, which is material, but still it is spiritual in that the will of God will be directly effective in all matters of government and conduct. Won't that be a day to praise the Lord? You look at what government is doing right now and you just want to weep or get disgusted and throw something at the TV. But the kingdom will be spiritual in that the will of God will be directly effective in all matters of government and conduct.

Why? Hear me. Why doesn't God do this sooner? Why does he do it in the millennial kingdom? Remember the laboratory experiment in human history. Perfect people in a perfect environment in the garden of Eden are capable of making an independent decision.

Fallen people in a fallen environment in the kingdoms of this world are able to make an independent decision for or against God and by degrees of faith to distinguish themselves in humility, in service, in dedication. The millennial kingdom is going to be imperfect people in a perfect environment. Do you see that we are solving for the independence of free will? This is what God is doing.

It's like science, good science. Perfect people, perfect environment. Imperfect people, imperfect environment.

Millennium, imperfect people, perfect environment. Perfect government. No need for faith.

It's all visible and open and available. And you can't plead ignorance. You can't plead, I just didn't understand.

You didn't reveal yourself. Why didn't you rip the fabric and poke your face through so that I wouldn't believe in evolution, but I would believe in creation. The creator will be on the earth,

visible.

Government will be perfect. You can't blame bad policy, but I will show you scripture coming up where people are going to hate perfect justice in the same way that they hated Christ when he came and he was perfect. His teaching was perfect and true.

He was the picture of love and self-sacrifice. He didn't judge. He didn't punish.

He didn't do anything, but manifest all of the grace and love of God. And he got crucified for it. He was rejected as king because people didn't want that kind of rule.

How much more so in the millennium? So I cannot blame my choices on my circumstances. I can't say, well, I would be better. I would be more if the millennial kingdom is going to be the final stake in the heart of this whole idea that I'm going to shift the blame somewhere else.

It's God's fault. It's people's fault. It's circumstances fault.

It's society's fault. The current social justice warrior paradigm. It's, you know, capitalism's fault.

It's nationalism's fault. It's something-ism's fault that the things aren't as they should be. Sorry, no.

We are captains of our own little individual ship and we can either humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God so that he exalts us in due time or not. But the purpose of the millennial kingdom is to be a literal perfect government kingdom. The perfection will fade as you get further from Jerusalem and further from Israel.

There are going to be nations where the disobedient and recalcitrant can be at home. But the closer you get to Jerusalem and within Jerusalem itself, they will not hurt nor destroy on all my holy mountain. Righteousness will be at home there.

And this is why we want to be those who qualify. Just as Israel will pass under the rod, we want to be that kind of person. This is the lesson.

This is the message. So, the future kingdom will not merely be an ideal kingdom. This is Alva J. McLean.

It will be literal as the historical kingdom of Israel. Just as literal as the past kingdom under David and Solomon will be the future kingdom under the Lord Jesus and the sons of David. All prophecy from first to last asserts and implies such literality in such details as location, nature, ruler, citizens, and the nations involved in the fact that it will destroy and supplant literal kingdoms in its direct connection as a restoration and continuation of the historical Davidic kingdom.

Well, that's all the time we have to cover this evening. But the reason we're looking at this post-exilic prophecy truth is the effect that it should have on us to get ready. Why did God deliver

this prophecy to these Israelites? The kingdom was not near.

It wasn't imminent in the historical sense. It was going to be 500 years before the Lord Jesus would appear. Five centuries will intervene.

Why Zechariah? Why this detail? Why this emphasis? Why these warnings? Why these predictions? What kind of people, Peter asks, ought we to be knowing that the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll and the elements are going to melt with a fervent heat, that there is a literal future coming kingdom of the son and kingdom of the father? What should we be doing with our time right now? If we are here breathing air, we have a mina in our hand to invest. For your devotionals, I strongly encourage you as I did to go read the parable of the minas in Luke chapter 19. And by the way, in that parable, weirdly mixed in with entrusting 10 servants with 10 minas, a mina each, the master departs to go receive a kingdom, but then there is a delegation sent after him to tell the authorities, we don't want this guy ruling over us.

Then that man returns, having received his kingdom, he rewards and disciplines his servants, and then he destroys those who sent the delegation. He slays them. Serious stuff.

Parable of the minas, don't miss it. Ought to be motivating for us. We upon whom the ends of the ages have come, all these things written for our instruction, we're still here.

We have an opportunity to make the most of what remains to us of this life. And what a privilege, what a potential. It's exciting.

And in these days, I got a feeling there's not a whole lot of time and potential left to exploit. So let's make the most of it. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the presence and power of your Holy Spirit to help us understand it and to see its pertinence and applicability in our own lives. We pray that we can truly represent the Lord Jesus Christ as his body on this earth in the time that remains, that we can grow in grace and knowledge. We can be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We can present ourselves holy and acceptable in your sight. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.