

God's Reign and Kingdom

Former Fuller professor George Ladd states that the Kingdom "occurs in history, not in personal individual experience."* John Goldingay challenges evangelicals when they say "that developing personal relationship with us is not the only thing God is really interested in. That is not so," he writes.** If we take the word Kingdom literally it means more than the individual; it also has to do with historical social structures in this world.

1. Read Mark 1:14-15 and Luke 17:20-21. Compare these verses with Mt 5:10. Do you see the Kingdom on individually? As present, future, or both?

2. Read Ezekiel 22:30. If God's reign includes everyone and every system (v. 25-29), the what does our call to stand in the breach or the gap mean for you?

3. Read the 36 parables in the 1st three gospels. Robert Linthicum writes (CITY OF GOD, 94) that the parables can be divided to show what Jesus believed about the kingdom (God's wants, Satanic struggle, kingdom now, its invitation, difference & entrance). Do you agree?

* George E. Ladd, **THE PATTERN OF NEW TESTAMENT TRUTH**, (Eerdmans, 1968), p.51.

** John Goldingay, "What are the Characteristics of Evangelical Study of the OT?", **EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY** 73:2 (2001), p. 101.

"The dynamic concept of the Kingdom of God suggests several principles which can issue in a biblical social ethic. ... In these principles is implied a 'social gospel,' for the reign of God in the lives of his people must be concerned with the total man and with the conquest of evil in whatever form it manifests itself. The church is the people of God, the instrument of the Kingdom of God in conflict with evil." George E. Ladd, **THE PRESENCE OF THE FUTURE**, Eerdmans, 1974), p. 303-4.

"By holding together the presence and the future of the Reign, we eliminate a barrier which has kept many Christians from involvement in efforts for social justice. ... The awareness that we cannot build a perfect society in history must not deflect us from the obligation to work for a better society. We would not think of postponing personal righteousness - sexual purity, for example - on the grounds that perfection will not come until after the Second Coming." Stephen Mott, **BIBLICAL ETHICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE**, (Oxford, 1982), p. 90-1.

The Political System in the Bible

In Biblical times, the political system was the most powerful as headed by the prince, the king - the ruler. We see the system as positive in Romans 13 and negative in Revelation 13. For us we readily recognize three systems (political, economic, and religious/value) as spelled out by Ezekiel (22:25-27 - see Bible Study 2, What went wrong?). In biblical times these systems were more integrated than today. In the New Testament these three systems are most clearly taught by Paul (Rom 13:1-7 - political), by James (Ja 4:7-10, 5:13-16 - religious) and by Peter (1 Pet 2:13-3:7 - economic).

1. Read Romans 13:1-7. Is our submission to government voluntary (v 1,5)? What if government is a beast (Rev. 13:11-14) or Acts 4:29?
2. Read Ezekiel 22:25, 6-12. In their fallenness, what do the princes do?
3. Read Deuteronomy 16:18-20, 17:14-15, 18-20. What is God's purpose for authorities?

"Deuteronomy presents God's design for the way the systems of the nations and the city are to operate. It is the summation of the Law. ... It is in essence the Readers Digest of the Law. ... The statutes and ordinances of Deuteronomy 12-38 are the specifics of about how the political, economic and religious systems should relate in order to guarantee shalom. ... the rest of the Bible carries it on in the real world." (Robert Linthicum in "Building a People of Power," Video Session 2, 2001)

The Bible and the Religious System

In Biblical times the religious community was more powerful and influential than in our society. (see below) Today we might understand the religious system as our value system which might include the media. In fact, the values promoted by the media can be recognized in the very fallenness of priests in Ezekiel (22:26). True religious authority rests in God to whom we pray, praise, and seek healing (James 4:13-16) and walk in his ways (Dt 11:28)

1. Read James 4:7-10, 5:13-16. Compare submission to God (v. 7) with submission to authorities (Romans 13). Is there conflict?

2. Read Ezekiel 22:26, 6. Would you agree that the media "profane my holy things?" How does the religious system fit with princes and economic officials? (v 25, 27)

3. Read Deuteronomy 10:12-14, 20-22. Spell out our relationship to God.

"The priestly oligarchy not only controlled the temple but were the group through which the distant Roman rulers worked. The temple itself was a central institution in the economy, serving also as the state bank." (Stephen Mott, personal email, 6/9/03)

On James 4:7-10 - "The idea of submission is usually directed to human authority (Rom 13:1) and not God. . . . James connects inward disposition with outward social concern and action." (washing of hands v2) The moral exhortation to humility in v. 6b & v. 10 closely parallel to the Old Testament appeal to Israel to return to Jahweh, the covenant God from whom they have strayed." (Ralph P. Marlin, JAMES (WORD), 1988)

The Bible and the Economic System

In 1 Peter 2:13-3:7 we find the household duty code. The household was the center of Israel's agrarian economy; therefore, by stretching our minds, the economic system. In fact, the word economy comes from the Greek *oikonomia*, household laws. In a broad sense, Paul saw himself as God's economist/manager making known God economic plan to the authorities. (see note below - Eph 3:9-10, 1:10) Thus, we are able to relate the household code to the economic system presented in the Old Testament in Ezekiel and Deuteronomy.

1. Read 1 Peter 2:13-3:7. Comment on the Biblical economy framed by the supreme authority and encased in the household code. (See footnote)

2. Ezekiel 22:27 12-13. Wolves nip and kill slowly while lions quickly tear their prey (v. 25). How is an oppressive economy like the wolf?

3. Read Deuteronomy 6:10-15, 15:4-5. What economic gifts were brought to the people? (v. 10-11) What is required? (v. 4-5)

"To every fundamental social institution, i.e. the State, the household and the family ... such institutions were part of God's plan for human life. ... Peter speaks rather of its divinely ordained functions: the institution itself...the home, including the labor employed in it ... reciprocal behavior of masters and men within the domestic circle is applicable to modern industrialism." (Edward C. Selwyn, **FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. PETER**, (1947), 172, 102, 105)

"We are justified in taking the social and economic laws and institutions of Israel and using them as models for our own ethical task in the wider world of modern-day secular society." (Christopher J. H. Wright, **AN EYE FOR AN EYE**, (Intervarsity,1983), p. 89)

*"In the world or universe (kosmos) - oikonomia = (God's) arrangement or management of the world and its affairs - 1 Cor 4:1-2; Col 1:25; Eph 1:10, 3:2,9 ... Latin, oeconomia - from which, in turn, came the older English spelling 'oeconomics,' from which we derive the modern spelling 'economics.'" (John Reumann, **STEWARDSHIP & THE ECONOMY OF GOD**, Eerdmans, 1992, p. 8, 6)*

The Prophetic System

Who speaks the word of the Lord? Through the ages God has raised up prophets to speak as God needs. Jesus was prophetic in society by judging leaders for neglecting justice. (Mt 23:23) In Corinth the prophet brought a revelation or a word of instruction. (1 Cor 14:26, 30-31) In fact, everyone could speak the word of the Lord - the prophethood of all believers (v. 31). But these prophets were subject to other prophets rebuke (v. 32). Was this pentecost a way to correct for the corruption Ezekiel writes of (EZ 22:28)? Even the Deuteronomic law noted such corruption (Dt 18:14). Nevertheless, God promised to raise up prophets with words to be told (v. 18). Their mandate was to call institutions to accountability.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 14:29-33, 37-40. In Corinth what do prophets do? (v. 31) Are prophets also spiritually-gifted? Must they follow Paul writings as the Lord's commands?

2. Read Ezekiel 22:28, 13:1-9. What did these corrupted prophets do? What about today? Have they become false prophets?

3. Read Deuteronomy 18:14-19. Should the church have prophets in today's society to speak God's word to the social systems?

"In the OT God reveals God's attitude toward the weak and what God correspondingly expected of the strong. The NT presupposes this revelation and reinforces it. Paul associates the OT obligation of justice with Christian responsibility for the poor (2 Cor 9:9-10). Jesus in his ethical teaching and practice stands in the tradition of the prophets; one will not understand Jesus or NT ethics except in the light of that continuity. (Mt 23:23)." (Stephen Mott, BIBLICAL ETHICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE, Oxford, 1982, p. 77)

Social Institutions and the People

In the New Testament we read of the people of God (laos) and other people who are part of Jesus' community (ochlos - Mark 3:32, 2:13, etc.). In the Old Testament as the nation's people there does not appear to be this distinction. But corruption came to these OT people in a big way in Ezekiel's time (EZ 22:29). In the New Testament the Christian people were set apart as the chosen people of God and called to be holy and obedient. Even though the times in the OT and NT were very different, God, in both cases, chose and chooses the people of God (Dt. 7:6, 1 Pet 2:9).

1. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12. As a chosen people of God what good deeds of justice should the church do in your community? Is this a technique for evangelism? (v. 12, cf. Mt 5:16 - see footnote)

2. Read EZ 22:29, 7. Were the people as corrupt as the leaders? Who did they attack? What did they do?

3. Read Deuteronomy 7:6-8; 8:11-18. As God's people what commands, laws and decrees should we follow? (v. 11) The ten commandments (5:7-21)? Other laws? Is the law a guide?

"The acts of love that lead to individual conversion and the glorification of God are not restricted to deeds within the community but include what the church does for the world. ... Glorifying God in 1 Pet 2:12 and Mt 5:16 means acclaiming his presence in the action carried out by the believers." (Stephen Mott, BIBLICAL ETHICS & SOCIAL CHANGE, Oxford, 1982, p. 137, 228 ft32)

The Shalom Community

The Hebrew word "shalom" is translated peace in the Old Testament. It is also translated prosper/prosperity (Jer 29:7). The word is hard to translate. Peace is inadequate. It really means wholeness of the person or the community. For the individuals it brings "health" (Ps 38:3) and "good old age" (Gen 15:15). For the nation there can be shalom (Ps 125:5). Shalom comes from God (Is 55:11-12; 57:19). For evangelicals who "read what the Old Testament actually says," (see footnote) does not shalom provide substance for the reign or kingdom of God?

1. Read Isaiah 65:19-25. A YAF (Youth with a Mission) with Linthicum study group shalom interpreted results of peace, prosperity, good reputation, adequate health care, meaningful employment, harmony in nature, and international peace. Do you agree? Can this Old Testament passage be authoritative today? (see footnote)

2. Read Ezekiel 22:31, 19-22. "Yahweh had no alternative but to do his worst ... destroy Jerusalem, bastion of perversity." (Ladd, 39) Do you agree?

3. Read Isaiah 32:16-`8 and Jeremiah 6:13-14. Do you see a tie between justice and peace? Would you change the translation from righteousness to justice? (see footnote)

"One of the most important callings of an evangelical OT scholar is to encourage Christians to read what the Old Testament actually says, rather than reinterpreting it so that it means something that fits with what we already believe. ... The glorious prospect of evangelical study of the OT is to open this wonderful book confident that it is God's word, and untrammelled by theories about what it has to say. It can say what it like." (John Goldingay, "What are the Characteristics of Evangelical Study of the OT", *EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY* 73:2 (2001), 104. 109.

"The question of whether consummation (of the kingdom) takes place in time or in eternity is foreign to the Old Testament. ... There is in 'Jesus' proclamation ... before the apocalyptic consummation at the end of history, a fulfillment of the prophetic hope has occurred within history ... his Kingdom has come as an event in history ... the blessing of actual fulfillment. ... OT promise ... fulfillment ... consummation." (George Ladd, *THE PATTERN OF NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT*, (Eerdmans, 1968), p. 51, 54)

"A rule of thumb is that when one sees righteousness or judgment in the context of social responsibility or oppression, one can assume that justice would be a better translation." Stephen Mott, *BIBLICAL ETHICS & SOCIAL CHANGE*, (Oxford, 1982), p. 59.