

Kingdom of God Overview – Mike Auffet

Introduction

It was a lackluster election year in the beginning of 1992. The incumbent president Bush Sr. refused to enter the political fray until he could justifiably turn his attention from the Iraq War. That year and the challenger, Clinton had made a personal commitment not to pander to various interest groups. This all made for dull election coverage. Bush proved to be a formidable opponent, a war hero himself, the Cold War finished, and international politics well in hand. How could such a person be vulnerable to a governor from a state whose numbers were less than many large cities?

The answer to this question came about in the revival of a familiar theme from the Reagan race to the Whitehouse; “are you better off now than you were four years ago”? The campaign gelled and the mantra “it’s the economy, stupid” was born. This proved to be the rallying point for the remainder of the campaign and as the proponents moved off this message the poll numbers declined precipitously only to strengthen with a return to the focal topic.

Now I am not agreeing that the defining measure is the economy, perhaps it can be a part of the overall equation but rather I am suggesting that there is a defining element in approaching the Scriptures. That theme is the Kingdom of God. McClain quotes John Bright: “The concept of the Kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, the total message of the Bible”; and, “Old Testament and New Testament thus stand together as two acts of a single drama. Act I points to its conclusion in Acts II, and without it the play is an incomplete, unsatisfying thing. But Act II must be read in light of Act I, else its meaning will be missed. For the play is organically one. The Bible is one book. Had we to give that book a title, we might call it ‘The Book of the Coming Kingdom of God.’ That is, indeed the central theme everywhere.”¹ Further, Ridderbos stated “The whole of the preaching of Jesus Christ and his apostles is concerned with the kingdom of God.”² And finally, Robert Saucy from the Progressive Dispensationalist camp “While mentioned far less often in the epistles, the ‘kingdom of God’ still qualifies as the summary of the apostolic teaching.”³ Dare we say today “it’s the Kingdom of God stupid?”

Tackling the available resources that seek to define the Kingdom of God is certainly a daunting task since the number of books is legion. It is nevertheless a fruitful endeavor to consider the broad implications of who has a rightful claim to the title “the Kingdom of God.” When the Church of Rome claimed to be the Kingdom of God as the “Church Militant” in the 4th century, she was in effect denying the need for a future expectation of the Savior’s Coming to set up an earthly personal reign because the Pope as the vicar of Christ was fulfilling that role. Subsequently, futurists were largely silenced in favor of the amillennial view that had strong postmillennial leanings. The pope had the final say over the crowning of Emperors and Kings and could justifiably hold to a “rule” over the nations. The Rise of Islam in the 7th century posed a threat to Christendom claiming that it was the true Kingdom of God and the defense of the Holy Lands, particularly Jerusalem launched the Crusades. (This simple outline is not intended to fully describe

¹ John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953, pp 7, 197.

² Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962), p. xi.

³ Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), p. 81.

the events of Church history but rather raise the issue of the importance of the Kingdom of God in human history.) The Reformation brought forth Protestants who would also make claim as rightful heirs to the true kingdom. They posited that an invisible body of elect that comprised the Kingdom of God between the First and Second Advents. The political nature of the Kingdom proved problematic to the Reformers as they sought to root the kingdom in the State Church role. It was not until Darby and others of his time divorced the Church from the political arena that the futurist position of a coming kingdom reemerged in history.

For the sake of completeness, the Kingdom of God did go through various contortions. Liberal Protestantism, steeped in enlightenment rationalism, identified the Kingdom of God with the moral progress of man – particularly in Germany. Several permutations developed, especially with the philosophy of pantheist Hegel as foundational. Secular and Process theology, broadly speaking, produced Marxism, Nazism and a plethora of utopian ideas that still persist. At present, the world is faced with the question who and what is the Kingdom of God? The players now include the Zionist movement, Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, various Evangelical groups, process theologians and strict futurists. The stage is set for articulating an answer to the people on the street and must be framed in these terms to make sense. For this reason my comments are directed primarily to pastors and teachers rather than traditional scholars.

The Message of Scripture:

Repeatedly, the message “repent for the Kingdom of God (Heaven)” recurs in the Gospels and yet the travesty of the ignorance of this concept is astounding. How can the central message of the Scriptures and the pointed and express purpose of the Baptizer’s and the Savior’s message be so neglected and frankly misinterpreted? Personally, I have tried in vain to find people in the pew who could express some notion of the meaning of the Kingdom or to understand something as simple as the Lord’s prayer in that connection. Millions mouth the words to this familiar passage without a clue of what they are asking. Further, it goes without saying that the central message of the Bible is lost as well. What remains? Generally, a strong commitment to the ethos of the Bible, a commitment to the psychological counseling benefits of Scripture, or a weak evangelistic appeal to an eschatological fulfillment in Heaven in order to avoid the pains of Hell. All of these truncate the message of the purposes of God in history which according to Hebrews 11:3 are vital to true faith. Without this confidence in God as the author of history and the assurance that His Word originates, sustains and directs all history there can be no Biblical faith. The proportion of scripture dedicated to the truth of the Kingdom of God demands this. Part and parcel with this concept, the Great Commission verbalizes the mandate “...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...” If anyone doubts this then I challenge you to consider the following question “what was Jesus primary message and what did he command?” I can promise that my experience in public settings has always led to hopeless expressions of bewilderment and confusion. It is because of this obvious dearth in Bible comprehension that I am proposing a new strategy for inculcating the Kingdom of God message to Evangelicals. But, before looking at strategy it would be helpful to look at the theological landscape as it pertains to Dispensationalists.

Walvoord's Battle with Ladd:

The publication of "Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God" marked a major departure within premillennialism. Dr. Ladd critiqued the Dispensational concept of the Kingdom of God and adherents to his viewpoint have increased steadily. Of Ladd, George Marsden wrote "'Ladd saw his calling as above all to correct evangelical scholarship's general lack of prestige. His ambition, as he sometimes told his students, was to write a book in biblical studies that every scholar in the field would have to respect.'"⁴ Notable figures include John Piper who professed his dependence on Ladd in a blog on Westminster's bookstore page speaking of books that influenced him most:

"In understanding the theology unique to the New Testament no one has influenced me more than George Ladd. This is true especially concerning the message of Jesus and the message of Paul and how they have a unified view of redemptive history. From Ladd's books, *A Theology of the New Testament* and *The Presence of the Future*, I came to appreciate the centrality of the coming of God's Kingdom into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation at the end of history. "Fulfillment without consummation", as Ladd puts it is the "mystery of the Kingdom" which we as believers are given to know. The essence of Christianity is "the already". The center of history is in the past. The decisive battle has been won against Satan. It was fought in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We now live in a tension as Christians for we are delivered from this present evil age and have our citizenship in heaven, but we are not yet perfected and the flesh, the world and Satan are not yet wholly abolished. Therefore we are more than conquerors but we still must fight.

Many others might have taught me this (Oscar Cullmann, Geerhardus Vos, etc.) but in the providence of God I learned it best from George Ladd and I am deeply grateful to him for his labor in study and writing."⁵

Three salient features emerge from this description: the concept of *mystery*, *redemptive history*, and *fulfillment without consummation*. All of these have been discussed at length by others and will not be addressed at this time. A further look at the evangelical landscape reveals the John Wimber also credits Ladd;

"At Fuller I was introduced to the writings of George Eldon Ladd, especially his books *The Presence of the Future* and *Critical Questions about the Kingdom of God*. From Dr. Ladd I came to believe that the kingdom of God is, in fact, relevant to our lives today. As I read George Ladd's books and reread the Gospels, I realized that at the very heart of the gospel lies the kingdom of God and that power for effective evangelism and discipleship relates directly to our understanding and experiencing the kingdom today. This revelation

⁴ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, (Grand Rapids, MI Eerdmans 1987), pg 248

⁵ Westminster Bookstore Blog, <http://www.westminsterbookstore.com>

remains the most significant spiritual experience since my conversion in 1963, because thereafter I explored the practical implications of the presence of the kingdom.”⁶

By now it should be evident how pervasive Ladd has become in evangelical circles. It undergirds restoration or dominion theology and for the most part carries a post tribulational rapture position. However, the most disheartening has come from those that hold Ladd’s view of the kingdom within the fold Dispensationalism. While most writers have been reluctant to associate Progressive Dispensationalist with George Ladd directly, it is in my view an unavoidable conclusion that there is an essential connection. Robert Thomas is very generous and accommodating to the Progressives leaving room for Bock who “admitted the closeness of his views regarding a present kingdom to those of George Ladd’s historic premillennialism...though claiming a distinction regarding the future kingdom.”⁷ In so doing this position has adopted the *mystery* kingdom concept and the *already not yet* or *fulfillment without consummation* position that Ladd expounded. Nothing has been said so far that should come as a surprise but I would like to add the third element; the *redemptive history* ingredient to the mix.

In Progressive Dispensationalism there has been a decided shift away from the Doxological approach of delineating the purpose of God in favor of a Christological scheme. That scheme is really a thinly veiled redemptive agenda that has been one of the hallmarks of Covenant Theology. All of this has opened dialog with the Reformed camps because it holds to a mediating view. However, it surrenders too many distinctions in the process and considered side by side to an outside observer one could correctly identify the differences as hairsplitting. In other words, it comes off as Covenant Premillennialism. The historic *sine qua non*, if it can be so expressed, of the distinction between Israel and the Church has been relegated to obscurity. Further, when this distinction is dismissed there is no longer an organic or inferential reason to hold to a pretribulational rapture.

One other criticism is in order. Bock much like Ladd has not decided on which “base covenant” to begin his Biblical Theology. Is it Abrahamic? or the Protoevangelion? or which? In a recent panel discussion about the Da Vinci Code, Bock made an offhanded comment that he was not sure if “foundationalism is possible in theology.” Now I am no philosopher so I will simply cite a definition of what I have found this to mean:

Foundationalism as understood by philosophers is first and foremost a position regarding the structure of justified belief or of knowledge. A foundationalist holds that all inferred beliefs must, to meet the requirements of rationality, be supported by a finite chain or tree of supporting beliefs, rather than by loops or circles of inference or by an infinite regress of reasons. On this view, beliefs cannot justify or support themselves, even in the presence of other supporting premises... A chief structural rival to foundationalism is coherentism, a position according to which loops of justification are permitted, sometimes with the proviso that a belief must also have support that comes from beliefs other than itself. On a coherentist model, inferential justification resembles an interwoven mat or a thicket (without “roots”) rather than a chain or a tree.⁸

⁶ John Wimber's booklet, *Kingdom Come* (Servant Publications, 1988), p.7-8.

⁷ Robert Thomas “The Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism” in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, (Lanham, MD:University Press of America, 2005),2

⁸ Lydia McGrew in ISCID Encyclopedia of Science and Philosophy, <http://www.iscid.org/encyclopedia/Foundationalism>

Granted, these observations have yet to be vetted, but it does appear that Progressive Dispensational hermeneutics have led it to an overemphasis on NT authors instead of the whole of scripture or the legal literature of the Pentateuch and later covenants. Bock for example finds his kingdom views principally in the Luke and Acts. This starting point in my view follows the coherentist approach if I understand this correctly and bears resemblance to isolating, Lukan, Johannine, or Pauline authorship to the point of independence from the entire canon of scripture. If nothing else, readers should gather this methodological observation: the OT Prophets and NT writers were not free to depart from the OT Covenants. Even the Lord Himself was compelled to observe the Mosaic Law in all points and thus fulfill it to enable the establishment of a New Covenant. Luke records Paul's final known activities in Acts 28:23b "From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets." Noteworthy, his source was the OT and from this source he restricted his teaching about the Kingdom of God. Should he not have sought definition from author Dr. Luke who provides such a formidable place in the Kingdom theology of the Progressives? What a missed opportunity.

The Need for Strategy:

After this brief look at how George Ladd has influenced the landscape of ecclesiology and eschatology by those who embrace his "Kingdom Now" beliefs, the conclusion must be that in sheer numbers the Laddian position has prevailed. Among Southern Baptists, in my experience, those holding dispensational leanings are generally found among the membership that once carried the Scofield Reference Bible; few that have seminary education hold to dispensationalism. In fact there has been a resurgence in Reformed theology as well but it seems that Piper holds sway among the youth in this denomination. Evangelical leaders that once were counted as dispensationalists are back peddling for a more nondescript view and the last stalwart supporters are found once again to the strictly fundamental groups. In other words, it is no longer fashionable or considered scholarly in the ranks of intelligentsia to be a dispensationalist. Ironically, it survives where it had its greatest impact – among the ordinary pilgrims that comprise the bulk of the Church. I was surprised by a conversation with a new seminarian from Ft. Worth when he confessed that he was now trying to justify his premillennialism from the scriptures rather than from his original source, the *Left Behind* series. Indeed, I have spoken with Mormons, Roman Catholics and others whose exposure to eschatology has been solely from this series. They were embracing it. These conversations have translated quite nicely into opportunities to present the gospel. What an incredible blessing this series has been.

But the remnant of dispensational leaders and communicators cannot rely on the *Left Behind* books alone as the frontal assault. The question is how long will this continue if the leadership in local congregations dismiss eschatology and refuse to teach an accurate message about the Kingdom of God? No these leaders must cast aside the laurels of the past and begin a new plan or risk extinction, become a persecuted minority, ridiculed and dismissed, indeed, to suffer the same plight as the lowly fundamentalist for his faith. Not a very bright future for those whose lofty position of old has brought accolades, speaking engagements, and multiple pulpit opportunities. Instead dispensationalists increasingly

find ourselves at the back of or thrown under the bus. I hope by now that the need for a new strategy has been demonstrated.

Excursis:

Seeing the Walvoord/Ladd debate as the crux issue in my view, it remains unfinished business and should be the sine qua non in the discussion. Traditionally, this was the distinction between Israel and the Church and the locus of the Davidic Throne. In a lecture series recorded in "Bib Sac" Ladd tips his hand to his methodology in defining his concept of the kingdom of God. In particular Ladd looked outside of the canon for his definition. "Conservative Bible students in America have paid little attention to this movement in liberal criticism; but it is part of the theological life of the world in which we live and has made a strong impact upon modern theological thought. It cannot be ignored."⁹ Naturally, this begs the question, why not? While the Pseudopigrapha and other extrabiblical texts can provide help in language and cultural expectations, they do not mold the authorship of the text of scripture. Is this an assault on the perspicuity of scripture or canonicity? Further,

"New Testament teaching that Jesus was God incarnate have largely ignored his position. However, the fact remains that Jesus came to Jews of the first century and of necessity had to relate His teaching to their thinking. Sound pedagogy must begin with the thinking of those who are taught, and Jesus was the Master Teacher. What did the "kingdom of God" mean in the ears of a first century Jew? What thoughts were aroused in his mind by the phrase "Son of Man"? Why did the Jews reject the Messiah? How did Christ's kingdom differ from the one they expected? From our vantage point, we interpret these phases in the light of the full New Testament revelation; it is obvious that a Jew of 30 A.D. could not do so. The appreciation of our Lord's self-revelation and of the response of the Jews to Him is greatly enhanced by an understanding of the mind of first century Judaism, especially with reference to eschatological and Messianic expectations.

Furthermore, it must be recognized that there *is* a certain relationship between New Testament eschatology and Jewish eschatology."¹⁰

The very criticism he levels at conservatives, the rejection of Sweitzer (earlier) because it presupposes the community shaping the self-revelation of Messiah, he in fact embraces. When he refers to the "necessity" of relating to their thinking and their concept of the kingdom of God and the Son of Man he is doing the same thing. This practice recurs in the Progressive hermeneutic as "significance." It is the notion that when NT authors use the OT the authors and their audience cannot communicate the same ideas because the idea or event has different meaning or significance. This strikes at the very theory of language. There is more here than the Hegelian dialectic which relativizes two positions

⁹Dallas Theological Seminary: *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 109*. Dallas Theological Seminary, 1952; 2002, S. 109:55

¹⁰Dallas Theological Seminary: *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 109*. Dallas Theological Seminary, 1952; 2002, S. 109:56

resolving it into a new synthesis. This is an assault on the possibility of revelation. Then Ladd cites Vos in defense of his approach:

“...we cannot deny that there are areas in which New Testament theology is very close to, if not identical with, contemporary Jewish eschatology where there is no antecedent Old Testament teaching. So striking is this phenomenon that one staunch contender for the Biblical faith, Geerhardus Vos, was led to say, “There is no escape from the conclusion that a piece of Jewish theology has been here by Revelation incorporated into the Apostle’s teaching....

The main structure of the Jewish Apocalyptic is embodied in our Lord’s teaching as well as in Paul’s.”⁵ This raises questions for the serious student of the Bible which necessarily involve an understanding of Jewish teaching. There is need for much scholarly study on the relationship between New Testament and Jewish eschatology. Conservatives have for the most part left this area of investigation to liberal scholars.”¹¹ All of this has led to the departure of an OT framework for understanding the scriptural notion of the kingdom of God further melding Ladd with amillennialism as far as an extant present kingdom.

Walvoord voraciously but graciously questioned Ladd in his review of *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God*. Listed are the usual criticisms that appear in a typical amillennial critique: a soteriological view of history unfolding as a redemptive history, the church beginning in the OT with a single people of God, the base covenant as the “protoevangelion” Gen 3:15 as the starting point of redemptive history, and the conscious disregard for the OT in favor of the NT in resolving the concept of the kingdom of God. His most cogent criticism challenges Ladd’s definition: “One of the major problems in the doctrine of the kingdom of God is definition. Dr. Ladd offers his definition on page 80 as follows: “If we may indicate our findings at the outset we may say that our study of the New Testament data has led to the conclusion that *the kingdom of God is the sovereign rule of God, manifested in the person and work of Christ, creating a people over whom he reigns, and issuing in a realm or realms in which the power of his reign is realized* (Italics in original). While this is a preliminary definition, it is singular that he has built so much upon the word for kingdom—*βασιλεία*, so little upon Biblical usage, or the Old Testament doctrine of the kingdom.”¹² Walvoord later questions the obvious omission of George N.H. Peters classic work *The Theocratic Kingdom*. Along these lines one has to ask how Dr. Walvoord too is guilty of adopting a major detour from Peter’s work. For Dr. Walvoord also held to a mystery form of the Kingdom of God in this age as opposed to Peters, McClain and others who only espoused a future Messianic Kingdom. Peters is very dogmatic about this and the postponement view cited in Walvoord’s review.

⁵ 5. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (published by the author, 1930) p. 28.

¹¹ Dallas Theological Seminary: *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 109*. Dallas Theological Seminary, 1952; 2002, S. 109:56-57

¹² Dallas Theological Seminary: *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 110*. Dallas Theological Seminary, 1953; 2002, S. 110:4

Strategy:

Loss of dispensational advocates to Ladd, shows the need for an apologetic to reinvigorate the theme of the Kingdom of God among evangelicals. The apologetic should not be directed to the Ph.D “class” who invariably do not change their positions but rather to this generation’s communicators, authors and pastors that have the ear of the ordinary members. It needs to be presented as a package rather than a series of critiques as most will no doubt recoil from piecemeal scholarship commonly found in seminary circles. Further, courses on this subject need to be available online that can then be completed as time permits which can be a part of the creditable coursework in Christian and Bible Colleges or as a source of continuing education for working professionals. It is doubtful but possible that such a program could be included at the graduate level as well.

Overview:

Beginning with an illustration from Ezekiel I would like to show how difficult it is to be objective in hermeneutics. I cannot recall anyone saying that they are going to depart from one or two hermeneutical canons to establish a theological system. Yet when this happens the author maintains certainty that they have not misappropriated the rules. From Eze 28 the description of the king of Tyre has led to almost universal consensus that the character in the text somehow morphs into Satan. Further proof for this position comes from supporting texts such as Isa. 14. Yet there is no known principle in hermeneutics that allows for this transformation. You cannot get there from here. More problems arise because of circular reasoning; the interpreter has filled his knowledge base regarding the doctrine of angelology and Satan from this text and naturally “fills in” the content when reading this passage. There are simply not that many texts that can be cited in this area. Add to that the source of this interpretation and the dilemma is further elucidated. In identifying this passage with Satan “(a)A variant of this approach, favored by several of the church fathers, is to understand for the background of the lament an account of the fall of Satan not given in Scripture but alluded to elsewhere, especially in Isa 14:12–17. Ezekiel would have been relying on his listeners/readers’ familiarity with such an account, and they would have understood the comparison between the fall of Satan and the fall of the king of Tyre.¹³ Appealing to Isa 14 is not helpful because it is a Babylonian taunt song and citing it for support suffers the same plight. One simply cannot go from one personage to the other with a normal hermeneutic.

This illustrates that once an idea has become part and parcel with normal and accepted thinking or a system that is practically impossible to eradicate it merely by an appeal to hermeneutics. The appeal to hermeutics as a strategy, though valid and correct, has had little sway in changing minds. Indeed, I have witnessed a self confessed Laddian rehearse the tenets cited by Dispensationalists by rote and yet did not see a conflict.

Better strategy, present and package the viewpoint in its entirety with its support to be more effective. Witness the case for mythology or even Higher Criticism. Given the

¹³Cooper, Lamar Eugene: *Ezekiel*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1994 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 17), S. 264

presupposition that the Prophets preceded Law based on Hegel's idea of progress and evolution, the growth of this idea ensues. Then more "scholars" come along and add layers till it gels into dogma. Mythology provides so much etiology that it becomes believable because the listener finds themselves accepting one presupposition after another. Such is the power of a good construct and apparently how the mind works.

Finally, there are few scholars that do in fact take the particulars and assemble them into a unified whole. However, most begin with a construct and then make adjustments as needed to bring it into line. Hopefully, this will be instructive in formulating a strategy. And again, the material is so massive on the subject of the Kingdom of God that starting from scratch as far as reformulation could be justified.

How I see it! Crude Garden Variety Dispensationalism (briefly, illustrating the method):

Beginning with Moses, the Human Author of the Pentateuch (yes I still believe in Mosaic authorship) I maintain the discipline of validating all Biblical interpretation from the paradigm set forth in these books. The Prophets did this too – they did not add to the Law but made application and appeal to return to the Mosaic precepts. In this they were reactionary not radical. The search for unity brings us to the Treaty Structure of the OT as it unfolds the nature of the Kingdom of God. Exodus 2:24 lists the Abrahamic Covenant as the starting place for Moses as he writes about his call to deliver Israel. God remembered his covenant with Abraham. Moses then narrates his call in his experience with the burning bush when God (the Word of God) speaks directly and reveals a new covenant in which "I will be with you" is the centerpiece. Similar to the name of God, Yahweh, this speaks of a new relationship wherein God dwells with His people. First, the tabernacle will be setup as a throne for God, a focal point for Him to exercise dominion as King over Israel. Later, the Temple in the place (Dt.12:11) that God would choose fulfilled that role. In this arrangement a new era in which the immanence and holiness of God is the stress ensues. He directly rules and resides with them. For example, they must be mindful of the sanitary conditions of the camp because God walks among them. In this regard, the newly born Theocracy resembles the Garden of Eden thematically where the Word of God was received directly in verbal form. Notice that the land described as "flowing with milk and honey", compares to the Garden of God, and a renewed access to communication with God.

The Treaty structure of the Mosaic Covenant resembled ancient near eastern documents that pictured the relationship of a Great King over a vassal king or kingdom. The exclusive rights of hegemony over the vassal precluded disloyalty to the covenant. Hence, the commandment prohibited this type of covenant with anyone else. To do so would be tantamount to acknowledging the superiority of the gods of another nation. The paying of tribute or the "tithe" was a tax to pay for protection of the Great King. The base covenant with Abraham resembled real estate contracts in which the king would guaranty the property rights of the lesser covenanter to perpetuity (see Cordell P. Schulten, "Legal Models for the Old Testament Covenants: An Issue of Contract or Real Property Law"). It expressed the rights of inheritance once secured to be irrevocable. The fact that Abraham himself did not live to enjoy these rights is of no consequence, the timing of

fulfillment was at the discretion of the grantor. In this we see the eventual heir finding fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Moses is charged with initiating the Theocracy. The Exodus pits God against the gods that the Kingdom of Man has elevated. Egypt is the resurgent kingdom that first appeared as Babylon. God will bring this Kingdom of Man down and in its place the Theocratic Kingdom will reign in Israel. This new order will place Israel as a mediator and nation of priests to the rest of the world. When she is established in the land she will in essence be living in the new Garden of Eden and the surrounding nations will be held responsible for the Revelation that comes from this Kingdom of Priests (Dt.4:5-8). I offer that the best explanation of the judgment of the nations in Eze. 24 – 35 results from their probationary response to God as He revealed Himself in the Theocracy. The nations in essence are treated in the same way as our first parents for failure to observe the revelation of God. They were in Eden the Garden of God.

After Moses lays out the theocracy and relates the failed attempt to enter the Land because of unbelief, he begins to extrapolate historically and prophetically. He selects historical events that parallel Israel's past. The events selected in Abraham's life for example, rehearse Israel's national experience. He casts antediluvian history in the then present legal framework that conforms to the Suzerain Vassal treaty. And he alludes to the Covenant and the talionic codes of justice as explanatory for world history (blessings and curses).

Beginning with Genesis, creation is delineated in 10 "and God said(s)." God's "separating" work harks back to His holiness. Indeed, the book itself has 10 sections which reminds the reader of the "10 words." Adam is charged to rule as viceroy to the Great king and "fill" the earth not just numerically but as the icon of God who bears His character. The Lord Jesus Christ will fulfill this as he "fills" all things and rules in a new creation under the Father's authority. Adam fails his commission and the Last Adam must bring it to completion. The events in the Garden like the 1st Chapter have didactic and hortatory significance. The Serpent tells them that God's revelation is insufficient knowledge and they must look beyond the Word of God and they themselves be the final arbiters of truth. One can easily observe the addition to the revealed word on Eve's part. Loyalty to the Covenant without admixture is paramount in its followers. The punishment fits the crime, and they are cast out of the land forfeiting the Presence of God. Just as in the Treaty there are stipulations that carry the death penalty or expulsion so the events in Eden mirror this. Moses' form of reporting appears to be covenantal as it is cast in suzerain-vassal language but it is not a formal covenant nor can it be construed as a "covenant of works." Naturally, this commends some tolerance. The writer does not attempt a complete narration of human history but is selective. Those that hold to a three part division, Law, Grace, and Kingdom can find support here. Moses writes from the viewpoint of Law.

The curse is well known and the association of the Virgin Birth with the "seed of the woman" has been made but little attention to sentence of the fear of snakes that hallmark this event. In my opinion this should mark this event in the same way as the Rainbow marks the Flood. The rise of the kingdom of man and the association of the king, or pharaoh, with the serpent whose image he bore would have been well understood by this Jewish audience.

In antediluvian times, the Garden was the place where God caused His Presence to dwell; where the Word of God could be communicated directly with men. With that lost, the Sovereignty of God was emphasized over His Immanence. With the “new Adam” in Noah God would again irrupt into human history in judgment on the “seed of the serpent” whose numbers had swelled and “filled the earth with violence.” A new era began after judgment and “peace” was declared and signified in the rainbow. In this account too we find the covenant motif before a formal covenant was enacted. God “remembered” Noah in the middle of the deluge and saved him and those that believed in the Ark. The division of “clean” and “unclean” animals has to have come from the Mosaic Law. Again, Moses tells the story not for the sake of merely what happened but why and thus it provides exhortation. The two people division carries forward. Beginning with believers, the world is once more inhabited with the seed of the serpent and a remnant that follow God. The Rise of the first Kingdom under Nimrod deliberately intends to thwart the Noahic Covenant. The Covenant that was made with Man and every living creature promises no future floods, calls for the sanctity of life, both human and animal, the institution of the death penalty, and the renewed commission to “fill” the earth. Nimrod deliberately violates these mandates as the first king in the Kingdom of Man. The penalty of judgment exacted in the confusion of languages brings in multinational compliance. Out of this new era of nationalism, God would establish a new nation to carry forth His Agenda. It would rise to prominence and be the mediator between God and Man. Like the Garden of Eden, it would not encompass the whole earth but its influence would be felt worldwide. It was the divine missionary agency. It is the divine intention that this nation would rule at God’s behest but their failure and refusal to repent resulted in their expulsion and the “great divorce.” The failure bears the consequences set out in the treaty but the constant prompting of the Prophets who acted largely in an accusatory covenant lawsuit did not deter Israel’s apostasy. Her rejection and future restoration Moses anticipated in Dt. 28 including the detail that she would be “sent back in ships to Egypt,” a prophesy that found fulfillment under the Roman rule. The promise of Messiah to restore Israel fulfilling the Abrahamic mandate and the other covenants constitutes the “hope” of Israel and does not differ (except in its refinement) from the hope of the Church today. Israel’s restoration would necessitate a New Covenant because she remained under the curse of the Mosaic Covenant. The Redeemer must pay the ransom demanded by the Law to bring about a new relationship.

Before this would happen God did something unusual. He transferred world dominion to imperial gentile powers. Four empires would arise and the “times of the gentiles” began and terminate in the Tribulation as John records. Babylon, with Nebuchadnezzar as the “head of gold” was its first representative. Recalling the garden motif, Dan. 4 speaks of an enormous tree that gave fruit and sustenance to all the birds and creatures of the world. Clearly, the garden alludes to the physical rule and dominance of these gentile powers. The allusion to Cyrus as God’s “shepherd” Isa. 44:28 and the direct title “my anointed one” Isa. 45:1 provides further credence. Israel in captivity and dispersion cannot observe her temple rites but can show faithfulness to God in her legal and ethical devotion. In this role she functions like Daniel in acting on the Covenant Law instead of Gentile decrees. Speaking in NT terms, Israel is “salt and light.” God directly shows his sovereignty over the nations and protects the remnant in numerous supernatural displays.

When the time of physical captivity expires, a part of Israel returns to rebuild. The new temple however, never reacquires the lost “glory of God” that Ezekiel narrated. The route of its departure recorded in the 10th and 11th chapter was reversed upon the “triumphal entry” by the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor does Israel have a king when her captivity ends. The first rule has as Davidite and Levite as governor and priest in the rebuilding of temple and city but no king is crowned. Indeed, something of a mystery come to the fore because the royal line has been cursed. This raises the question of how Messiah can rule. An interesting parallel, that the first rebuilding of the physical temple required a member of the royal line and a Levite and the Coming of Messiah also had two of these tribal representatives. And much like Samuel, John the Baptist was a Prophet too. So the kingdom is not restored nor does the Presence of God return to the newly erected temple. Not surprising that the national expectation centered on the physical kingdom but apparently overlooking the key component, the Presence of God in the Temple. In the Exodus account the priority was the Presence, national standing was second. Further, the loss of the kingdom came from the refusal of the nation to repent – the first requirement prescribed in the preaching of John and Jesus.

The Apostles and Gospel writers present Jesus as the King, Son of Man, Son of God, Son of David, and the Prophet – titles rich in theological meaning. He is at first graciously received at the triumphal entry as the Messiah only to be rejected at the urging of the Religious Leaders. He offers a genuine restoration of the Kingdom conditioned on repentance. The rejection of the King thus is a forfeiture of the Kingdom. A remnant later responded at Pentecost and they carried the message throughout the world. The apostles continue to preach the Kingdom of God to the nation warning of the fate of this “perverse generation.” In so doing they are continuing the offer of the kingdom before Israel is destroyed. The promise and continued offer of the Kingdom is proof that the Church is not the promised kingdom but that the presentation and fulfillment await Israel’s national repentance and reception of the Messiah. In other words, why continue to offer the kingdom if they are already in it.

The more telling questions concerns paying tribute to Caesar. The OT prohibition of making a greater to lesser treaty alliance with an earthly power was everywhere evidenced in the Old Testament. The permission of Jesus to pay taxes to Caesar provides further proof the “times of the gentiles” continued until such time that the prophesy of Daniel was fulfilled and the Kingdom or “rock not cut out with hands” would be established at the end of the Tribulation. This is the crux. If the Church is the kingdom then it should not submit to the Kingdom of Man and its Satanic representative. Yet Paul says of its authority that they are ministers of God. A mystery form of the kingdom does not alleviate this either. If the Church is in fact the Kingdom, then there is only one earthly authority and you will have a tough time arguing why you are not in submission to Rome. Obviously, Rome took on the persona as the Kingdom of God in history and tried to usurp world rule. She now enjoys national status at Vatican City but this flies in the face of the express mission of the Church. The Church exists not as a place but as a congregation. The “true worshipers” are not confined to Jerusalem or Mt. Gerazim but rather exist as pilgrims that tabernacle the Glory of God wherever they meet. They infiltrate the Kingdom of Man taking prisoners from the enemy and move like yeast in the lump. The church exists as an institution in a new spiritual building made up of people whose foundation is the Apostles and Prophets with Jesus Christ as the Chief

Cornerstone. When the Church meets locally they exhibit by faith a coming Theocracy by behaving as it was now present. Offices are observed and service is rendered in an organization that demonstrates by faith the future reality. But this organization recognizes that civil rule still resides in the Kingdom of Man and coexistence means conflict. It should be noted that only in conflict can differences and values be exposed much as a light shining in darkness. The church is called upon to be this witness but not produce the results. Even as leaven grows within the lump, eventually the byproducts of metabolism stymie the leaven itself. In the end, a remnant of the faithful survive while leaving the structure with few adherents. Such an example from our own history exists. Puritan New England wrestled with the status of their unbelieving progeny. The Old Line Calvinists sought to save society by holding to the structure of a church centered community maintaining civic dominance such as blue laws while the Evangelicals stressed individual conversion and spirituality. In the same way, there will be “churchianity” and a remnant of true believers. So telling, the Savior asked “when the Son of Man comes will he find faith (in his coming) on the earth?” The sense is rhetorical. People will not be looking for his coming and it will overtake them “as a thief in the night.” The faithful stewards will be rewarded and the hypocrites cast into outer darkness.

Further uses of the Garden motif come from Paul. He describes a new creation, new covenant relationship in Christ and freedom from the power of sin. This freedom is eschatological with death the last enemy defeated but also experiential in not choosing the enslavement of the flesh. The power of choice returns as it existed in the garden. Paul generally cites support from the created order rather than the Law for norms in the Church Age (an example the role of women in the church).

It practically goes without saying that the restored Kingdom of God is everywhere the paradigm in the Apocalypse of John. From that account it appears that the most basic definition of the kingdom of God should be found in this terminal account. This connects Genesis and Revelation as the ultimate fulfillment is simply a return with the Last Adam taking the position of the first. Perhaps a part of the floating proverb: the last shall be first and the first shall be last.

Conclusion:

The overview presented is not intended to be the final word but more of an illustration of strategy. Notice how convincing a narrative can be versus a piecemeal discussion. It is time that the dispensationalist reexamines the system in terms of the main theme of the Bible – the Kingdom of God. George Peters has it correct in proposition 3:

Obs. 12. The only way to rid ourselves of these ill-defined and antagonistic explanations, is to adopt *legitimate principles of interpretation*, and then carefully, in detail, examine the original covenants and promises upon which the kingdom is based; and if we have obtained a definition *strictly in accordance* with these, *never* to depart from the same, without the most express—not inferential—proof in hand that a change is denoted.¹⁴

¹⁴Peters, George H.M.: *The Theocratic Kingdom*. Pleasant Places Press, 2005; 2005, S. 1:46

This practice will rightly place the illustration and metaphoric value of parables that speak of the mysteries of the kingdom in their logical place. They cannot override the OT covenants and promises. And it begins with a correct definition of kingdom and then the disciplined application of a consistent hermeneutic. One more warning from Peters is in order. He states that error most frequently arises from the neglect of distinguishing between the Universal and promised kingdom of God:

Prop. 79. The Kingdom of God, promised by covenant and prophets, is to be distinguished from the general and universal Sovereignty of God.

This is, owing to lack of discrimination, *a most fruitful source* of mistake. Take the Kingdom in its initiatory form and its covenanted and predicted aspect, and it will be found *widely different* from the Sovereignty that God exercises by virtue of His Godheadship. The latter indeed is the source of the former, but *the Kingdom of covenant is a visible, outward Theocratic Kingdom*, manifested here on earth, identified with a certain people, promised in a definite manner, and ruled over by “the man ordained.” As we shall show hereafter (Prop. 81), it is a Kingdom specifically promised to the “*the Son of Man*,” who is the Son of David. These, and other aspects of it, clearly *distinguish it from* such a sovereignty.¹⁵

And on this McClain would agree though he calls it the “Mediatorial Kingdom.” Again, it behooves us to look back to the pioneers of the Bible Conference movement and examine this system of Biblical Theology in light of the treaties that archeology has brought to light.

¹⁵Peters, George H.M.: *The Theocratic Kingdom*. Pleasant Places Press, 2005; 2005, S. 1:556