

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART III

by Dr. Andy Woods

Because today's evangelical world largely believes that the church is presently experiencing the messianic kingdom, we began a study chronicling what the Bible teaches concerning this important issue of the kingdom. That there will be a future, messianic kingdom on earth has been revealed thus far through the divine intention to restore the office of Theocratic Administrator (Gen. 1:26-28) that was lost in Eden (Gen. 3) as well as through the promise of a future, earthly, messianic reign as prophesied in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15) and related sub-covenants.

THEOCRACY'S DEPARTURE AND RETURN

The next major place in God's Word that speaks to the reality of a future, messianic kingdom is the revelation of the Mosaic Covenant that God gave exclusively to national Israel (Ps. 147:19-20) at Mount Sinai. After the Fall in Eden (Gen. 3), the theocratic kingdom left the earth. This departure left the world without the benefit of the office of Theocratic Administrator until the time of Moses. This reality may explain why the Apostle Paul describes the spiritually dark time period between Adam and Moses as follows: “for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come” (Rom. 5:13-14).

Although the time period between Adam and Moses was indeed spiritually dark, the light of the office of Theocratic Administrator eventually returned to the earth through God's revelation of the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai. Despite four hundred years of bondage in Egypt (Gen. 15:13-16), God graciously redeemed and liberated His people through the Exodus. He then brought His redeemed people to Sinai and entered into a new covenant with them called the "Mosaic Covenant." Note the occurrence of the term "kingdom" as God entered into this new covenant with Israel. "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a *kingdom* of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel" (Exod. 19:5-6; emphasis mine).¹ Because this is the first reference to the term "kingdom" in relation to God's kingdom in all of the Bible, it is reasonable to conclude that the office of Theocratic Administrator that was lost in Eden was restored to the earth, at least in a limited sense, at Sinai. Just as God governed indirectly through Adam in Eden, God now began to rule indirectly over Israel through His Theocratic Administrator Moses. This theocratic arrangement covered most of Old Testament history as God, even after the time of Moses, governed Israel indirectly through Joshua, and then various judges, and finally Israel's kings.²

AN UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT WITH A CONDITIONAL BLESSING

The Mosaic Covenant also introduced a new component to God's covenantal dealings with Israel. This new element must be understood in order to comprehend the

¹ All scriptural citations taken from the NASB.

² Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Kingdom of God," in *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, ed. Tim LaHaye (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2001), 1134.

divine blueprint concerning a future, earthly kingdom. As argued previously in this series, the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants are unconditional. In other words, they rest completely upon God rather than Israel's performance for their eventual fulfillment. By contrast, the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 19–24) is conditional. Notice the terms “if” and “then” in Exodus 19:5-6: “Now then, **if** you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, **then** you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (emphasis mine). In other words, if Israel obeys the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, then God will bless the nation physically, materially, and spiritually.

The technical covenantal structure in the ancient Near East for this type of agreement is known as a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty. Here, the suzerain, or a superior, enters into an agreement with an inferior, or a vassal. The vassal promises to come under the protective custody of the suzerain. The suzerain, in turn, promises to bless or curse the vassal depending upon whether the vassal demonstrates loyalty or disloyalty to the suzerain by either obeying or disobeying the specific terms of the covenant text. In the case of the Mosaic Covenant, the suzerain is God, Israel is the vassal, the covenant text is the Ten Commandments and all of their applications as spelled out in the Mosaic Law (Exod. 19–24; Lev.; Deut.), and the blessings and curses for covenant obedience are found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. In contrast to this suzerain-vassal arrangement, the afore-mentioned unconditional, Abrahamic Covenant represents an ancient Near East covenant known as a "Royal Grant Treaty" where a king promises to unconditionally reward a subject.

If the Abrahamic Covenant and its related sub-covenants are unconditional and the Mosaic Covenant is conditional, then how does God deal with Israel under both of these covenants? The answer lies in understanding the difference between *ownership* and *possession*. Suppose that someone owns a vacation home and yet they are too busy working to visit this home. At this point, this person *owns* the home but does not *possess* or enjoy it. In the same way, the Abrahamic covenant gives Israel unconditional *ownership* of its various promises. Due to the Abrahamic Covenant's unconditional nature, no amount of disobedience on Israel's part can remove her *ownership* of these blessings. While Israel can be severely disciplined by God for disobeying the terms of the Mosaic Covenant (Lev. 26:14-46; Deut. 28:15-68), even resulting in the nation's conquest by foreign powers (Deut. 28:49-50), she can never forfeit *ownership* of the promises spoken of in the Abrahamic Covenant.

However, before Israel can *possess* or enjoy what she owns, she must obey the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, any given generation within Israel must meet the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant in order to experience the blessings promised in the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants.³ An important provision of the Mosaic Covenant is that Israel must enthrone the king of God's own choosing (Deut. 17:15). Such an enthronement will thereby satisfy the condition of obedience found in the Mosaic Covenant thus allowing Israel *to possess* rather than merely *own* the Abrahamic Covenant's blessings. The Mosaic Covenant ultimately points toward Christ. In John 5:45-47, Jesus explained to the Jews of His day, "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do

³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 86.

not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" Here is what the whole picture looks like: While Israel *owns* the covenantal blessings found in the Abrahamic Covenant and related sub-covenants, she cannot *possess* or enter into these blessings until she complies with the condition found in the Mosaic Covenant. However, this condition can be satisfied through the nation's enthronement of the king of God's own choosing (Deut. 17:15), who is Christ (John 5:45-47).

How does all of this relate to the subject of a future earthly kingdom? Although the Abrahamic Covenantal promises and blessings are unconditionally guaranteed to come directly to Israel and indirectly to the entire world, these kingdom conditions will not manifest themselves until national Israel trusts Jesus Christ, her long-awaited King. Because, there has never existed a Jewish generation who has complied with this condition, the messianic kingdom remains in a state of postponement or abeyance up until the present hour. However, one day, a future generation of Jews will comply with this condition resulting in the establishment of the messianic kingdom of God on earth. It will take the events of the future Tribulation period to bring such a generation to faith in Christ thereby leading to the manifestation of the earthly, theocratic, messianic kingdom (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9:24-27; Zech. 12:10; Matt. 23:37-39; 24:31; 25:31).

FROM DIVIDED KINGDOM TO TERMINATION OF EARTHLY THEOCRACY

The theocratic kingdom over Israel that God began through Moses at Sinai continued unabated through the reigns of the nation's first three kings, Saul, David, and Solomon. Unfortunately, the prosperity that characterized Solomon's forty year reign ended with covenant

disobedience as Israel's third king amassed wealth and multiple wives (1 Kgs. 11:1-8) in violation of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 17:16-17). Thus, God brought covenant discipline to the nation through the division of the kingdom (1 Kgs. 12). This division resulted in ten tribes forming the northern kingdom, or Israel, and the remaining two tribes forming the southern kingdom, or Judah. Two reasons made Judah in the south the focus of God's kingdom program. First, ancient messianic prophecy indicated that the nation's true king would one day be born into the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10). Second, the kings from David's line reigned over Judah only. These Davidic kings are significant regarding tracing God's kingdom program through Scripture since the previously described Davidic Covenant promised that through David's lineage would ultimately come an eternal dynasty and throne (2 Sam. 7:13-16). The kings over the northern kingdom continued in covenant rebellion. Such failure eventually led to maximum divine discipline (Deut. 28:49-50), in the form of the scattering of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (2 Kgs. 17).

Thus, from 722 B.C. until the Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C., only the southern kingdom, Judah, remained as the earthly theocratic kingdom. Sadly, the southern kingdom imitated the covenant rebellion of the previously dispersed northern tribes, incurring more divine discipline (Deut. 28:49-50), by means of the Babylonian Captivity. When Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Solomonic temple and

took Judah away into captivity (2 Kgs. 25; Ezek. 33:21), the earthly theocracy terminated. In other words, God governed the nation indirectly through various Davidic kings until the deposing of Zedekiah, who was the last of the Davidic dynasty to reign from David's Throne. This termination of the earthly theocracy was signified through the departure of God's Shekinah glory from the temple (Ezek. 10:4, 18-19; 11:23).⁴

(To Be Continued...)

⁴ Toussaint, "The Kingdom of God," 1134.