
God's Kingdom in the Whole Bible

SCOTT HOEZEE

Mr. Rogers had the kingdom in the *Neighborhood of Make-Believe*. Disney World lets you visit the *Magic Kingdom*. Once in a while, you hear of some far-off place, like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Typically, though, for a lot of us, pondering the reality of a kingdom is not an everyday occurrence. It seems mostly to be the stuff of fairytales and foreign lands. Yet, in the Bible, kingdom talk is all over the place, and it was a pillar in the proclamation of John the Baptist and also Jesus himself. Today on *Groundwork*, we will begin a series to help us understand the kingdom of God. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are beginning, with this program, a four-part series on the kingdom of God in the Bible. Now, in this first episode, we are going to think about the kingdom concept just kind of generally; and then we are going to spend some time tracing the Old Testament background behind all that talk about the kingdom of God, in the gospels in particular, but in the New Testament generally.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, you know, thinking about this...and we will get into this in the episodes, Scott...the idea and the concept of what the kingdom of God is. We know what an earthly kingdom is; it is a rule, it is a governance, it is way of doing things...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the way the people live under a king's dominion; and so, you know, even though there will be comparing and contrasting of what that means versus the kingdom of God, the idea of kingdom concept...we understand that fundamentally; and scripture teaches us about the difference between the two.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; but just to show how prominent the concept of kingdom was for Jesus and the disciples, let's listen to the opening verses of the book of Acts, written by Luke. Luke writes: In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.³ After his suffering, he (Jesus) presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"⁷ He (Jesus) said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my

witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we have this book written by Luke, who is an historian under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God decides through Luke to capture the importance of what is going on in this first set of verses in the book of Acts, and it is interesting what is pointed out, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, two things are noteworthy in the passage we just read: First, Darrell, I think it is very revealing to see that in the time between his resurrection from the dead and his ascension into heaven...a period that lasted forty days...Jesus apparently talked a ton about the kingdom of God; and since Jesus was already by that time the victor over sin and death and hell, you just have to assume that anything Jesus devoted that much time to talking about had to be a matter of utmost importance.

DARRELL DELANEY

Definitely; because he could have talked about anything after being resurrected from the dead...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But he focused on this for the forty days that he remained after the resurrection. So, it is definitely something that we are not supposed to miss.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, yes; when you have been raised from the dead, you don't spend your time talking about trivial, minor things. You talk about things of utmost importance, and obviously for Jesus, the kingdom of God was that. He taught them about the kingdom of God. It is interesting in the Bible that those forty days, we know almost nothing about it...almost nothing at all. Kind of like the casual way Luke wrote: Once when he was eating with them... It is like, well, I would like to hear more about that...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we don't know the specifics of what Jesus said, but probably it was just rehearsing everything he had taught about the kingdom before his death.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important because...I mean, here is what we do know: Over five hundred witnesses saw him walking around as a person who was raised from the dead, and we also know that he focused on teaching the kingdom of God principles in how they are to live, because Jesus knows he is going to ascend, and he knows he is going to bring the gift of the Holy Spirit after; and they are going to *need* that power to live out what this kingdom of God actually looks like, which is very significant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they are going to need that Holy Spirit for another reason, and that is the second interesting thing about the opening of Acts here: That even on this side of Easter...even forty days after Easter...the disciples were still misunderstanding the nature of Jesus' kingdom. I mean, Jesus had made it abundantly clear...and we will see that all through this series on *Groundwork*...that his kingdom was not like the kingdoms of this world. It was a kingdom, not about power and conquest, but sacrifice, humility, service. Jesus had not come to conquer the Roman Empire and replace it with the new kingdom of Israel that would rule the world, but Darrell, the disciples kept missing the point.

DARRELL DELANEY

They did; and you can see that in Mark Chapter 10, right after Jesus says you have got to be like a child to enter into the kingdom of God, but we read this, picking up in verse 35*, it says: Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. ³⁷They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other on your left in your glory.”

So, they don’t get it. They are looking for power grabs; they are looking for political positions; because that is their only frame of reference as earthly people. They only know what they have seen the Roman government and other things do, but they haven’t understood yet what God is trying to get to them about the kingdom of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You can see this in all the gospels, especially in Mark. There is just a regular pattern: Jesus predicts his death; Jesus makes clear that humility is the way into the kingdom; and then immediately thereafter, one or more of the disciples start to argue about which of them is the greatest, or in Mark 10, one of them wanted to be Secretary of State and the other one wanted to be Secretary of Defense in the kingdom that they were sure was coming to rule this world. They didn’t listen well, but that is why they needed that Holy Spirit, because after Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out on them, finally they understood; and then, they became like Jesus; now called the apostles, they talked about the kingdom of God. You know, we recently did a *Groundwork* series on the missionary journeys of Paul, and in that series, we noted that everywhere Paul went, we read something like this from Acts 19:8:

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

DARRELL DELANEY

After that, in the end of the book of Acts, in Chapter 28, it says: ³⁰For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

So, we don’t get what happens at the end of Paul’s life pretty much until we get to the general epistles of Timothy, but in his own life, the biography, right here in Acts, he ends the book by talking about the kingdom of God while he is under house arrest. It is very important to him to make sure he gets that to everyone who will listen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; he was living in the city of Rome at the time, but he didn’t talk about conquering Rome, but he did talk about the reality of God’s kingdom in Christ Jesus, who is the Lord of Lords, and the King of Kings. So clearly, for John the Baptist, for Jesus, for the apostles, for the Apostle Paul, talking about the kingdom, arguing persuasively for it, it says in Acts 19, that is tied in at the core of the gospel. The gospel of good news, but the good news is not just that your own personal sins were forgiven by Jesus’ death on the cross, the gospel is that in Jesus, an everlasting kingdom has arrived.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is a beautiful thing to understand that; but we also understand that the kingdom of God did not just pop into the book of the Bible in the New Testament. It actually started in the Old Testament, and we want to talk about that in the next segment. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we have just seen what a prominent theme the kingdom of God was in the preaching and teaching of Jesus, and then later the apostles; but as you just said, Darrell, at the end of that first segment of this program, in the New Testament, kingdom talk did not just come out of the blue.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the kingdom of God is some concept that God has been trying to get to his people for centuries. I think it starts when he begins the covenant relationship with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; but also, God has been trying to help the people of Israel understand that he wants to be their God, and he wants them to be his people. That is the establishment of the relationship that the kingdom of God is going to be going in, and we have a ton of scripture to talk about where that begins and how that begins.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, it begins in God's chosen people of Israel. Isreal, of course, Darrell, was finally made up of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That nation would be God's starting point...or maybe his beachhead in his plan of global salvation, but ultimately, that plan he made was not going to end with Israel, it was to come to all the nations of the earth. God said that to Abram right off the bat, already in Genesis 12 when he started to make his covenant with Abram; but of course, the first order of business is that Israel itself had to become a nation.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, in the book of Genesis, Abraham is told two promises: He is going to have land, he is going to have descendants. But we don't see the full manifestation of either of them in the book of Genesis. So, we get one heir, and then he has sons; but Abraham's life...before he dies, he doesn't get to see all of this stuff manifest. So, God's plan has to extend far-reaching, and God is the covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God who will keep that through his children; but we don't see the full picture in the first book.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, at the end of Genesis, and then at the very beginning of Exodus, it harks back to this. We are told that seventy people traveled from Canaan to Egypt when Joseph was second in command to the Pharaoh there. There was a famine, so Jacob and his sons and their wives and families moved; but they are only seventy. There were only seventy folks. That is a long way from a nation, right? But, over the centuries to come, those seventy would multiply into a true nation. In fact, Darrell, in Exodus 1, for the very first time in the Bible, the Hebrew word for *nation* got applied to Israel.

DARRELL DELANEY

Isn't it interesting that we turn one page in our Bibles and it goes from seventy people to I don't know how...enough...numerous enough to be called a nation; and numerous for Pharaoh to be intimidated by them, so that he tries to kill the firstborn, and all the things that he does to them. So, there is some time lapse between Genesis and Exodus that shows that there is now a nation that God could work with that he would be able to use and bring into his kingdom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, they are a nation; that is great; promise fulfilled to Abram, but they are an enslaved nation. Pharaoh, as you just said, Darrell, came to fear that they were too numerous, and so they fall into slavery. God gets them out of slavery, of course, through the leadership of Moses and Aaron, and he leads them ultimately, after they pass through the Red Sea, and the Egyptian army is defeated, they end up at Mount Sinai, where God is going to give his laws and his ways and his desires; and then we read this in Exodus 19, beginning at verse 3: Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴'You yourselves have seen

what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

DARRELL DELANEY

Can you imagine, Scott, being a slave your whole life, and then seeing God do these magnificent plagues to deliver you from bondage, and then hearing these words that you are a kingdom of priests, after being enslaved your whole life. It is such a transformation that has to happen in their minds and hearts that God had intended in the first place; and it is so important to God that he mentions it again in psalms like Psalm Chapter 10, where it says: ¹⁶The Lord is king forever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. So, if the Lord is king, and he establishes you in his kingdom, you are established, period!

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, indeed, God...Yahweh...the God of Israel was supposed to be their king; but, as many of us remember, eventually the people wanted an earthly king, just like the other nations. We can read about that in 1 Samuel 8.

DARRELL DELANEY

Picking up in verse 4, it says: So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." ⁶But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. ⁷And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹Now listen to them, but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights." ¹⁰Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights... ¹⁹But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. ²⁰Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." ²¹When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. ²²The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." And we know what happened after that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Be careful what you wish for, God basically says. So, okay; they go along with it. Saul starts out as Israel's first king, but he messes up. He was a real disappointment, so the kingship gets ripped away; and eventually it goes to the youngest son of a man named Jesse from Bethlehem, and that is the boy, David. Now, David will go on to have his own problems later in life: that whole business with Uriah and Bathsheba, and all that. But nevertheless, God settled it irrevocably on David; and let's hear this from 2 Samuel 7. David had wanted to build God a temple. God says: No; your son is going to do that. Instead, God says this: 2 Samuel 7:11b: The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: ¹²When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He is the one who will build a house for my Name... (verse 16) Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." So, David is the one...this is the covenant with David. God says there will always be a king in the line of David; and ultimately, Darrell, we know that the ultimate Son of David is Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it is interesting because God does not want to use the earthly way to do kings, but because they introduced this with Saul, God is like: Okay, I will pick a person after my own heart to do it; but then I will show you that the true Messiah is going to come through that bloodline. So, the kingdom of God will be established on earth, but in spiritual terms and in natural terms; but not in the way we think.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; So, if we go to Palm Sunday, here is Luke 19 in Luke's version. ³⁷When he (Jesus) came down near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully [singing]... ³⁸“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

As we have seen, Darrell, indeed, Jesus was a different kind of king, as you just said, but he is the ultimate one from the line of David. He is the true Son of David.

Well, as we wrap up the program in a moment, Darrell, we will end with a few further reflections. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we just saw Jesus as being hailed as the final Son of David, the ultimate king; and we often think about this, Darrell, during the season of Advent, that reality of Jesus as the ultimate King of Kings was foretold in a passage like this one from Isaiah 9: ⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord [God] Almighty will accomplish this.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, I don't know about you, Scott, but I don't know any earthly kingdom or governance that is described this way: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the government of peace there will be no end. We have always seen terms come to end, whether you are voting a new person in or a person dies and it is transferred, but when Jesus does this the way it is supposed to be done, it will never end.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; we are going to look at this more in the next episode. Jesus declared that the kingdom had already begun to break into this world through him and through his ministry; but of course, Darrell, it is not a kingdom like we usually think of one, right? I mean, earthly nations and kingdoms have borders. You can locate earthly kingdoms on a map, and when you cross over from one nation to the next, things look different. If you go from the United States to Canada, there are similarities, but once you are in Canada, everything is in the metric system...kilometers not miles...meters not yards...the stripes on the streets are different...some traffic lights work a little differently. If you left the United States to go into the kingdom of Great Britain, you would find everybody driving on the opposite side of the road than they do back home. So, you know, usually when you enter a specific kingdom, you can tell, but that is not quite how Jesus' kingdom works.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the spiritual kingdom transcends those borders and boundaries that you are talking about; and we will talk about this in the next program, where the borders and the dynamics of race and class and those are all shattered. So, the spiritual kingdom has much more power and dominion coming from God, no matter what the differences are.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; walking through life, you never encounter a sign that says: Welcome to God's kingdom; or one that says: You are now leaving God's kingdom; come again. No; and we don't carry a physical passport on us that shows that we are citizens of the kingdom of God. So, where is the kingdom? Well, to quote the great

theologian, Dallas Willard, he wrote that: The kingdom of God is present wherever and whenever the will of the king is calling the shots. Where is the kingdom? It is wherever King Jesus is calling the shots.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that. I also love what Jesus said in Luke 17. He said: (verse 21 paraphrased) The kingdom of God is everywhere, but it is also within you. So, because the kingdom of God is within us, it matters how we live, how we treat one another, and how we interact, so that we can be representatives of that kingdom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, when we encounter people bearing the fruit of the Spirit, we are in the kingdom of God; when we find people serving one another in Christlike humility, we are in the kingdom of God; when suffering people are given hope, we basically think of Matthew 25, you know: When we visit those in prison or those who are sick; when we clothe the naked; feed the hungry; give something to drink for the thirsty, we are in the kingdom of God; because when we live in those ways, then we show that the great King of Kings is calling the shots, and that always puts us in the sphere of God's kingdom.

DARRELL DELANEY

Not only that, Scott, but the Lord is presently attentive to those circumstances when we feed the hungry, when we give water to the thirsty, he says in Matthew 25 that we have done that for him. So, he is connected intimately...not only on the side of the giver, but on the side of the receiver...so, the kingdom of God is inbreaking on both sides of that as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As we wrap up this program, Darrell, I wonder if we maybe ask ourselves: How often we hear the kingdom of God preached? How often do we really celebrate the kingdom of God in worship services? I mean, we have seen in this episode...we will see plenty more in the remaining three episodes of this series...how pervasive kingdom talk is in both the Old and the New Testaments, right? We see that teaching about the kingdom was all Jesus could do during the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension. We saw that the apostles picked up on that. Paul talked about the kingdom right up to his dying breath, apparently. How often are we like that? I mean, how conscious are we about the kingdom of God?

DARRELL DELANEY

I think the answer, Scott, is not enough. I think that we need to understand that any practical things we do out of worship and gratitude to God is evidence of the kingdom working in those areas. Personally, we need to be made more aware of what God is doing and how he is doing it; and as preachers and people who proclaim God's Word, we need to connect the practical application of what people are doing with the worship of God and the inbreaking of the kingdom; we need to make those connections.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you know, we read Exodus 19 earlier about how Israel was to be a kingdom of God's choosing...a priesthood of believers. The Apostle Peter picks up on that. 1 Peter 2:9: You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is also an echo to Revelation, where Jesus says: John, write this down: They are going to be kings and priests—these people that I am calling. So, it is not only that that kingdom and priesthood continues from the Old Testament in 1 Peter, but even the Revelation, when every tribe, language, and people and nation are there together in diversity and unity, they still have that being established.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And until that great and coming time at the end of all things there, the Church now is the new Israel. There is sometimes confusion about the modern state of Israel, and are they God's people? Well, we believe that the Church now is the new Israel. We are heirs and adopted heirs of the final Son of David...King Jesus, that is. The idea that the Church is the new Israel is taught in lots of places in the New Testament, but one of the more explicit references, Darrell, comes at the very end of the letter to the Galatians, Galatians 6:14: May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. (And then Paul writes) ¹⁶Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God. So, the Church is now the new Israel.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and I love the fact that God had that plan all along. I mean, way back in Isaiah 49 he says: I will make you my people as a light to the nations, that my salvation shall reach the ends of the earth; and that is what people see and notice about the kingdom of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we are now, by baptism, citizens of that very kingdom, and that glorious fact reminds us of that first stanza of that wonderful hymn: Praise my soul, the King of Heaven, to his feet your tribute bring. Ransom, healed, restored, forgiven; ever more his praises sing: Alleluia, alleluia, praise the everlasting King.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we discover more about the nearness of the kingdom of God by studying Jesus' preaching and miracles. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or to tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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***Correction:** The audio of this program misstates the reference for this passage as Mark 10:38. The correct reference is Mark 10:35.

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