

God's Big Picture

Introducing the Bible

1. The Bible is One Book

Ignorance of the Bible

Knowledge of the Bible is declining; many own a Bible but few read it. Even Christians: how many read and understand the Old Testament dietary regulations, or Job, or the Minor Prophets? What is the relevance of the genealogical lists? How do we apply the stories about the Judges, or David and Goliath, or Daniel in the lions' den? How does the Bible hang together?

This series of studies aims to help us find our bearings in the Bible.

A collection of diverse writings

The Bible is a collection of 66 books (39 OT and 27 NT). These were written by at least 36 human authors over a period of about 1500 years (1400 BC to AD 100). The 66 books are written in different styles:

- *Historical narrative* These tell the story about creation, the history of Israel, the life of Jesus and the some of the events in the spread of the Gospel.
- *Legal codes* Much of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are legal codes that governed the religious and social life of Israel.
- *Prophecy* The prophets spoke to Israel about present circumstances and behaviour and what God would do in the future. Prophecy is often poetic.
- *Psalms* The psalms are songs and are written in a special poetical style.
- *Wisdom literature* Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon are wisdom literature. They are often written in short (aphoristic) sentences which are designed to make us think carefully about what God requires of us.
- *Letters* There are 21 letters in the NT. They are real letters, from real people to real people, addressing real issues in the lives of individuals and churches.

Each type of literature needs to be understood in its own terms (just as you don't read a poem and a newspaper in the same way).

One book

Despite the diversity in the Bible, it is one book, and ought to be read as a whole. We won't really understand the NT unless we have read the OT. Imagine reading only Part 1 of *The Lord of the Rings*. It would be amusing but unsatisfying – all those loose threads. How if we read only Part 3? We wouldn't understand how the various threads in the story were resolved.

Jesus' proclamation that "the kingdom of God is at hand" is much more comprehensible if we know OT history. Leviticus helps us to understand the Cross. We also understand prophecy better in the light of the Gospel.

One author

The Bible is one book because, ultimately, it has one source. Behind its human authors there is one divine author. "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). So each book of the Bible bears the individual character of its human author (family background, education, personality, etc.) and the authority of God. The Bible is both a human and a divine book.

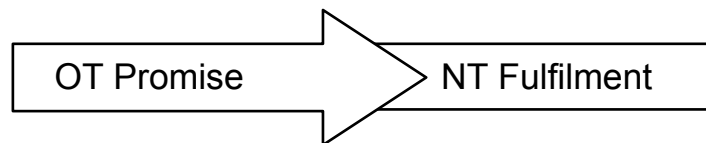
One subject

Because of its unity, the Bible has a coherent message. It has a single story line (the history of redemption) and a single ethic (salvation by grace alone for God's glory alone). One person binds the Bible together: Jesus Christ.

Jesus said of the OT: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39).

After his resurrection: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to [the disciples on the road to Emmaus] in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

To all the disciples: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).



2. The Kingdom of God

The unity of the Bible suggests that we can find grand themes (big pictures) that run right through its 66 books. Two major themes have been identified: the covenant and the kingdom. In this study we will look at the Bible in terms of the theme of "the kingdom of God." The *kingdom* is God's big picture.

The Kingdom of God:
God's people...living in God's presence...under God's rule and blessing

The Old Testament

1. The pattern of the kingdom (the Garden of Eden)
2. The perished kingdom (the Fall)
3. The promised kingdom (Abraham)
4. The partial kingdom (David's dynasty)
5. The prophesied kingdom (the ministry of the prophets)

The New Testament

6. The present kingdom (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ)
7. The proclaimed kingdom (the proclamation of the Gospel)
8. The perfected kingdom (the new heavens and new earth)

God's Big Picture

1. Creation: The Pattern of the Kingdom (Genesis 1-2)

Genesis 1-2 gives us a vision of how the world was meant to be.

1. God is the author of creation

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The cosmos is not eternal; it has a beginning, determined by the will of God. In contrast, God has no beginning. He is, was, and always shall be, three persons yet one God. Creation is the work of all three persons of the Godhead:

The Father: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!...For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36).

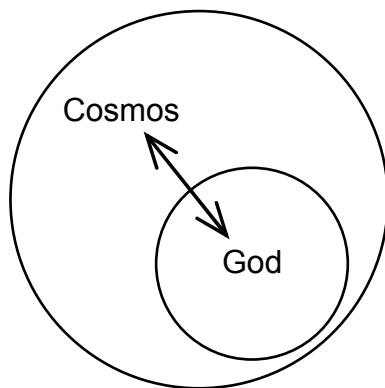
The Son: “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). “For by him all things were created...all things were created through him and for him” (Col. 1:16).

The Spirit: “The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2).

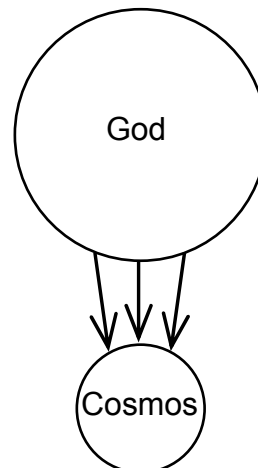
God’s evaluation of his work is immensely important: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). The Bible affirms that the physical is good. In contrast many pagan philosophers rejected the physical as contemptible; for them the body was a “prison”.

But God does not reject what he has made – he has redeemed the whole cosmos through Jesus Christ. So the story of the Bible takes us back to Eden (again and again in stories like the *Exodus* and *Ruth*, and ultimately at the end of *Revelation*.)

2. God is the king of creation



The pagan view of God



The Biblical view of God

The duty of all creatures is to worship their Creator: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4:11).

3. Human beings are the pinnacle of creation

Mankind was the last of God's creative works

Mankind was the greatest of God's creative works: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26a).

Mankind was the beneficiary of God's creative works (Ps. 104:14-23).

Mankind was the steward of God's works "Then God said, '...And let them have dominion...'" (Gen. 1:26b).

4. "Rest" is the goal of creation

When creation was finished, God rested (Gen. 2:1-3). Genesis does not record that there was evening and morning on the seventh day: God rested from his work of creation and did not come back to do more.

Rather, God invited mankind to enter into his rest. The parallel account of creation in Genesis 2 focuses on mankind and shows life as it was meant to be lived. This is seen in a series of perfect relationships:

God and mankind Both generosity and authority

Man and woman Complementary natures

Mankind and creation Dominion, working, keeping

The Sabbath continues to be a witness to God's purpose of redeeming men and women and bringing them into his presence (Heb. 4:9-10).

5. The kingdom is patterned by the creation

The conditions in which the first human pair lived in Eden are the first sketch of what the kingdom of God is to be. The development of the story of the Bible does not add any new elements to the picture – it only adds colour and depth. The Bible's presentation of the kingdom will not become different, only richer.

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	<u>The pattern of the kingdom</u>
God's people...	Adam and Eve
in God's presence...	God's fellowship in Eden
enjoying God's rule and blessing	God's Word; creation blessings expressed in perfect relationships

God's Big Picture

2. *The Fall: The Perished Kingdom (Genesis 3-11)*

Genesis 3-11 reports the Fall of mankind and its consequences. The kingdom of God disappears from sight. Is the kingdom still operative?

1. **The Perishing of the Kingdom**

It is helpful to start by reminding ourselves what we mean by the “kingdom of God” and what we learned about the “pattern of the kingdom”. We can set the “perished kingdom” into the template of the kingdom.

<u><i>The kingdom of God</i></u>	<u><i>The pattern of the kingdom</i></u>	<u><i>The perished kingdom</i></u>
God's people...	Adam and Eve	No one
in God's presence...	God's fellowship in Eden	Driven from God's presence in Eden
enjoying God's rule and blessing	God's Word; creation blessings expressed in perfect relationships	All relationships broken; creation blessing is lost and humanity dies

Rejecting of God's rule – Wrecking relationships

The perishing of the Kingdom begins with the rejection of God's rule.

- The serpent introduces the possibility of setting another source of authority alongside God's Word (“Did God really say...?”).
- The serpent denies that God is correct in his statement about the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge (“You will not surely die.”).
- The serpent insinuates that Adam and Eve will obtain an authority like God's if they take the forbidden fruit (“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”).

Adam's disobedience is not just law-breaking; it is also an attempt at law-making.

The effect of the first sin is felt in the three relationships enjoyed by mankind:

- Alienation from God (“The LORD God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’”).
- Alienation from one-another (“To the woman he said, ‘...Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’”).

- Alienation from the environment (“To Adam he said, ‘...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.’”).

Driven from Eden – Cast out of God’s presence

“The LORD God sent [Adam] out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:23-24).

The depopulation of the kingdom

The population of the kingdom was reduced to zero – on the day that Adam broke the command of God, he died. That, at any rate, was Satan’s plan. But God had not finished...the King had an important announcement to make.

2. The King Makes an Important Announcement

“The LORD God said to the serpent, ‘...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel’” (Gen 3:15).

There will be two lines, two “seeds”, one of the serpent and the other of the woman. By grace God maintains the kingdom so that it is not depopulated.

3. The Ongoing Story

Genesis 4-11 describes life outside the kingdom. When God’s rule is rejected and people live without his life-giving presence, there is social chaos:

- Cain and Abel – the first son murders the first brother (Gen. 4:1-16).
- Lamech – the first bigamist; he is arrogant and bloodthirsty (Gen. 4:23-24).
- Flood – the earth was full of violence; ruined by the corruption of humanity; God released creation forces to wipe the earth clean (Gen. 6:1-9:17).
- Nimrod – arrogance survived the Flood (Gen. 10:8-11).
- Babel – men refused to obey the command of God. They said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4).

Under these circumstances, is the kingdom of God still operative?

God's Big Picture

3. Abraham: The Promised Kingdom (Genesis 12-22)

At the end of the previous study (“The Perished Kingdom”) we asked whether the kingdom of God could still operate outside Eden. The Fall reduced the population of the kingdom to zero; Adam and Eve were driven from God’s presence; creation blessings were lost, all relationships were broken, and humanity died. The kingdom appears to lie in ruins.

But into this devastation God spoke words of grace to a single man: Abram.

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	<u>The pattern of the kingdom</u>	<u>The perished kingdom</u>	<u>The promised kingdom</u>
God’s people...	Adam and Eve	No one	Abraham’s descendants
in God’s presence...	God’s fellowship in Eden	Driven from God’s presence in Eden	Canaan
enjoying God’s rule and blessing	God’s Word; creation blessings expressed in perfect relationships	All relationships broken; creation blessing is lost and humanity dies	Blessing to Israel and the nations

1. People Propose to Build the Kingdom of Man

The Tower of Babel is the necessary background to the call of Abram.

- It happened at Shinar, the southern end of the Euphrates. This is a centre of idolatry. It is from this region that Abram was called.
- Purpose: to build a man-centred civilisation (“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth,” Gen. 11:4).
- Enormous potential: “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (Gen. 11:6).

Men take the initiative to build the “kingdom of man”, i.e.

- The people: mankind (“...let us build ourselves...”)
- The land: a city, so that we won’t be scattered.
- The blessing: we’ll make a name for ourselves.

2. The LORD Promises to Build the Kingdom of God

God stopped the Babel project. But from the land of Shinar he called Abram:

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Gen. 12:1-3).

The initiative lies with God. He promises to build the kingdom of God:

- The people: “I will make of you a great nation.”
- The land: “Go...to the land that I will show you.”
- The blessing: “I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”

“It may truly be said without exaggeration that not only the rest of the Old Testament but the whole of the New Testament are an outworking of these promises of God” (John Stott).

3. The Promised Kingdom and the Offspring

When Abram arrives in Canaan God says to him, “To your offspring I will give this land” (Gen. 12:7). Paul points out that God says “your offspring” rather than “your offsprings”, i.e. the promise is made to one person, namely Christ (Gal. 3:16).

The final promise God made to Abraham demonstrates that the kingdom belongs to Christ the offspring, but also that in Christ the kingdom is promised to a multitude of others (Gen 22:17-18):

- The people: “I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.”
- The land: “And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies...”
- The blessing: “In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”

4. The Promised Kingdom and Faith

Abraham was the man of faith (Gal. 3:9). His faith demonstrates that the promised kingdom is received by faith alone:

“And [God] brought [Abram] outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:5-6).

The kingdom of man is built on “the works of the law”. The kingdom of God is built on grace and received by faith.

God's Big Picture

4. Israel out of Egypt: The Priestly Kingdom

The story of the (partial) fulfilment of the promised kingdom is long and complex. It includes:

- the conquest of Canaan and the failure of the judges of Israel;
- the reigns of David and Solomon and the failure of the kings of Israel;
- the ministry of the prophets and the restoration from Babylonian exile.

Before we look at these, we will consider the exodus from Egypt. In particular we will look at how the events at Sinai fit into the template of the Kingdom.

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	<u>The priestly kingdom</u>
God's people... in God's presence... enjoying God's rule and blessing	Aaron inside the Tabernacle, and Israel camped around The Tabernacle, and especially the ark of the covenant Aaron bestowing blessing on Israel: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you..."

The key text here is Exodus 19:4-6.

God's presence "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and **brought you to myself**" (Ex. 19:4).

Sinai was pre-eminently the place where God was present. He wanted Israel to be with him, near to him, so he brought them to himself. Notice that God acts to do this – it is on his initiative and by his power that Israel comes to him. Israel is the passive object of God's redemption.

God's rule/blessing Now therefore, **if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant...**" (Ex. 19:5a).

But if Israel is passive with respect to redemption, the people are expected to be active as redeemed people. Compare with Adam in Eden: passive with respect to creation, but expected to be active as God's creature (working the garden and keeping the commandment about the Tree of Knowledge).

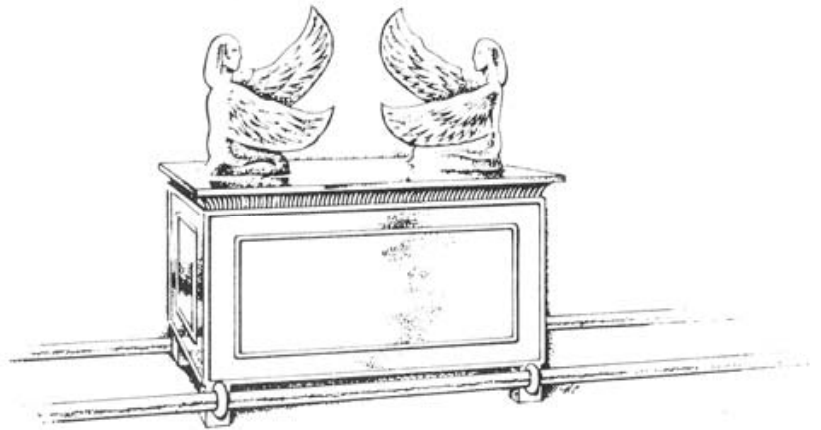
God's people "...**you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**" (Ex. 19:5b-6).

Relationship is restored and the kingdom is re-populated.

1. The Ark of the Covenant and the Presence of God

The book of Exodus is rich in images that tells us about the presence of God, e.g. mount Sinai wreathed in smoke and fire. The most enduring symbol of God's presence was the ark of the covenant. This was a wooden box, approx. 3 foot 9 inches long, and 1 foot 10.5 inches in height and breadth, and overlaid with gold. Into it were placed the stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments. On top of the box was set a lid of pure gold called "the atonement cover" (also translated "mercy seat"). Two gold figures of cherubim were worked for the atonement cover. The ark was never to be touched; it was only carried on poles.

The ark was like a throne or a chariot seat. It was where God made himself most intensively present in Israel.



Right: The Ark of the Covenant

2. God's Presence and God's Place and God's Person

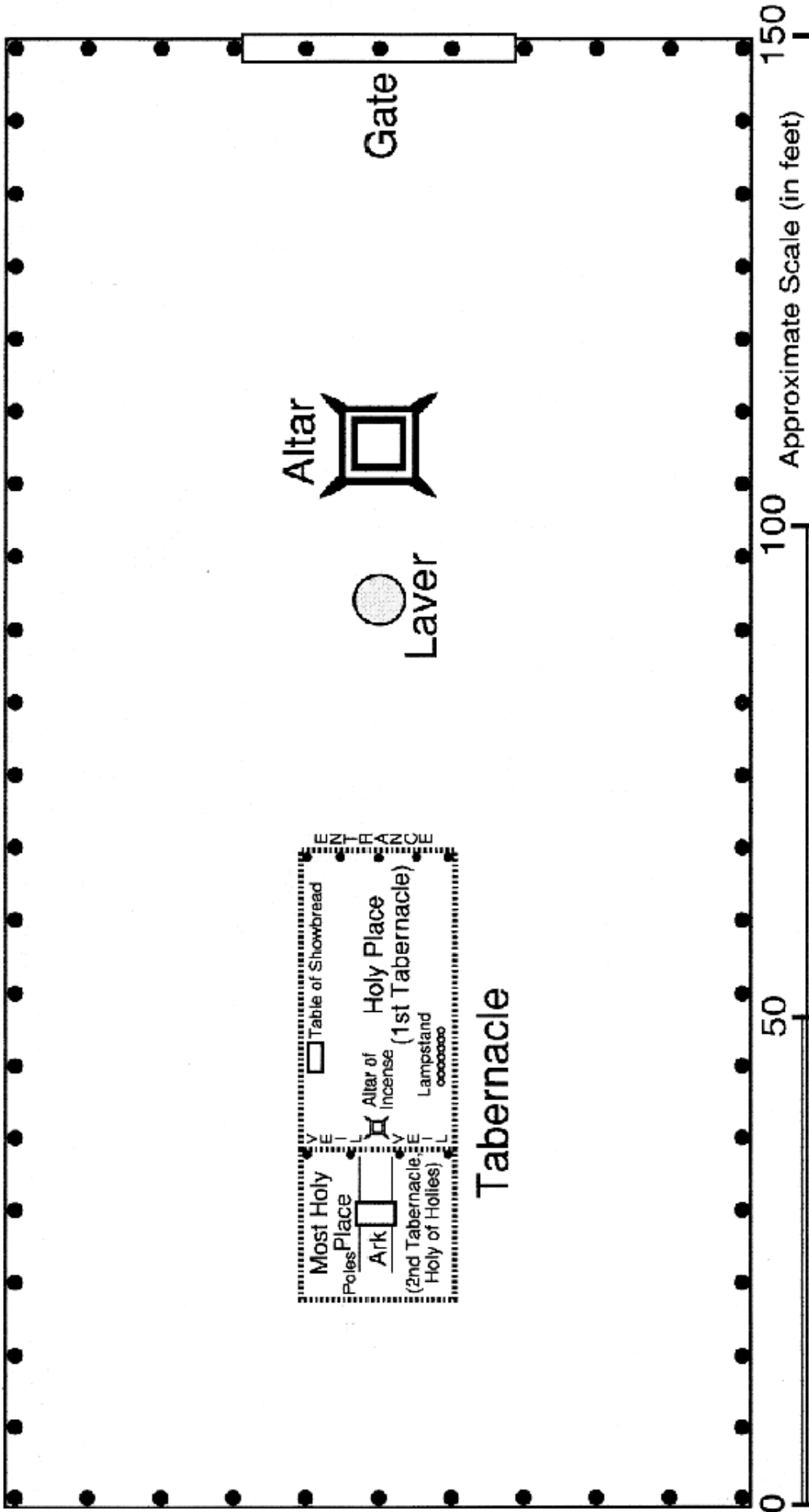
God, represented by the ark of the covenant, dwelt in the Most Holy Place, within the Tabernacle, within the tabernacle courtyard, in the midst of Israel. The Tabernacle was "God's place"; it was a little model of the Garden of Eden, complete with food (the shew bread laid out on a gold table) and the Tree of Life, represented by the "menorah" or lampstand. Aaron, representing Israel, stood in the Tabernacle – just as Adam, representing all humanity, stood in Eden.



Left: The high priest

*Right: The Menorah
(Lampstand)*





3. God's Presence and God's Rule and Blessing

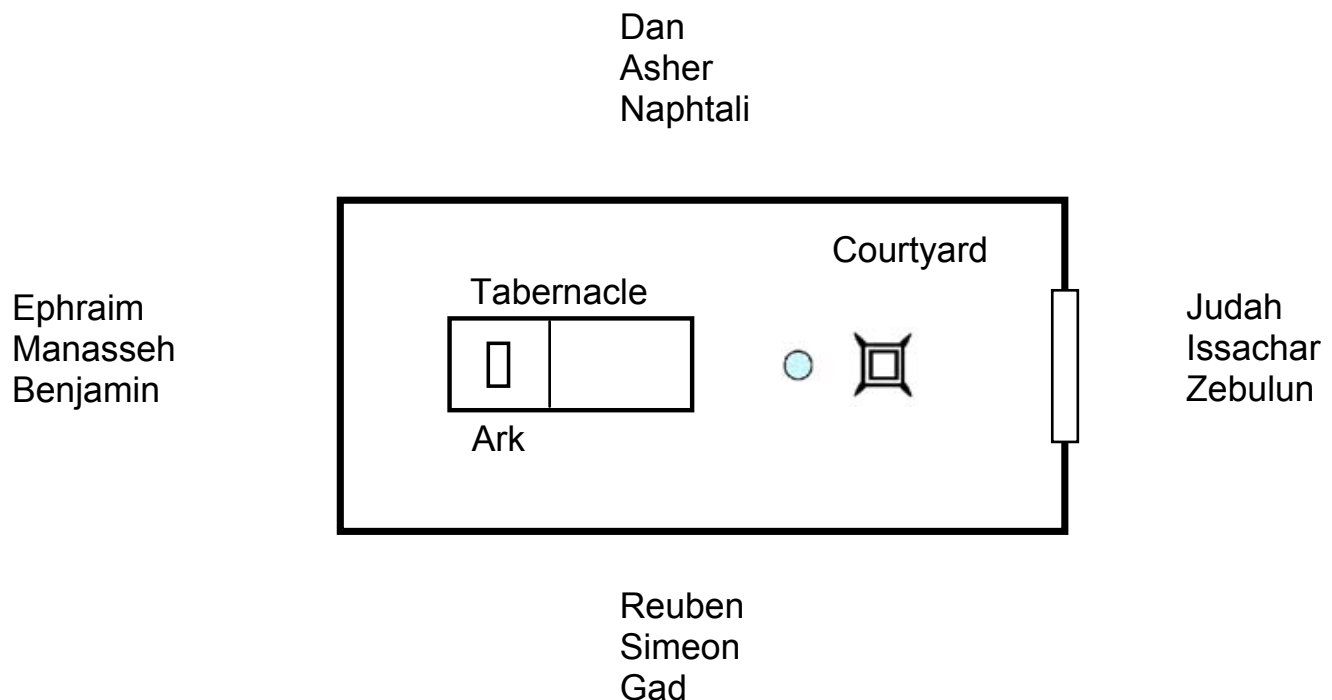
The "testimony" (the Ten Commandments) placed inside the ark of the covenant demonstrated that God's rule extended out to Israel from the presence of God.

Blessing also extended out to Israel. This was demonstrated on the Day of Atonement. The Tabernacle was placed in the courtyard of the Tabernacle. The courtyard made it clear that access to God was only on the basis of sacrifice. God is holy, and no one defiled by sin can approach him. But once a year the high priest made the full journey into the presence of God (the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place) and made atonement for the people. When the high priest emerged from the Most Holy Place it was to bless the people.

Israel encamped around the courtyard of the Tabernacle. In this way the ark of the covenant (the symbol of the presence of God) lay at the heart of the encampment.

- God's people (the 12 tribes of Israel)...
- ...dwelt in God's presence (represented by the ark of the covenant in the midst of the Tabernacle)...
- ...and enjoyed God's rule and blessing (expressed by the two tablets placed in the ark, and the atonement made annually by the high priest in the Most Holy Place).

Israel was a *kingdom of priests*.



God's Big Picture

5. David and Solomon: The Partial Kingdom

This study concerns the partial fulfilment of the promise God made to Abraham. This partial fulfilment covers a period of approximately 1,000 years, from the Exodus (c. 1450 BC) to the Babylonian exile (600 BC). To give focus to the study we will consider the brightest episode of this long period of time, namely the reigns of David and Solomon.

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	<u>The pattern of the kingdom</u>	<u>The promised kingdom</u>	<u>The partial kingdom</u>
God's people...	Adam and Eve	Abraham's descendants	The 12 Tribes of Israel...
in God's presence...	God's fellowship in Eden	Canaan	...living in the land of Canaan, with the capital at Jerusalem and the Temple in Zion...
enjoying God's rule and blessing	God's Word; creation blessings expressed in perfect relationships	Blessing to Israel and the nations	...under the rule of David and his descendants

The conquest of Canaan occurred about 1400 BC. God's people (the 12 tribes of Israel) entered God's land (the land of Canaan) where they were under the rule of God (the covenant made at Sinai). However, the next 400 years were a period of instability. The book of Judges describes the gradual "Canaanisation" of Israel – God's people refused to live by the covenant (God's rule) and adopted instead the practices of the peoples they had displaced. Even the demand of the people for a king (1 Sam. 8) was an expression of Israel's paganisation. However, God overruled their rebellion – Saul was a king after their own (pagan) heart; but David was a king after God's heart.

1. David and the Embodiment of God's Kingdom

The key passage in the story of David is 2 Samuel 7, especially vv. 8-17 in which God speaks to David about his dynasty ("house"). The promise that God makes David contains the elements of the Kingdom:

God's people God makes repeated mention of "my people Israel". But particularly he promises David a "seed" (v. 12) who will sit on David's throne after him. The promise of a "seed" ought to remind us of the promise of a "seed" to

Abraham. The Kingdom depends more on this one Person than on the many people who are members of the Kingdom.

God's presence In v. 10 God promises to give Israel security in his land through David's reign. Moreover, the promised "seed" will prepare a place for God to dwell among his people. Land and presence are two aspects of this one promise.

God's rule and blessing This takes the form of salvation from Israel's enemies ("violent men," vv. 10-11).

The promise of the kingdom will be fulfilled through David's dynasty. Verse 16 indicates that complete fulfilment is to be expected.

2. Solomon and the Golden Era

Great stress is laid in the promise to David on the promised "seed". A partial fulfilment is seen in Solomon. Solomon's reign was the golden era of Israel. The splendour of his reign is described, e.g. in 1 Kings 4:

God's people "Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea" (v. 20).

God's land/presence "Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt" (v. 21). The land of Israel was extended to its full boundaries during Solomon's reign. Most especially the promise concerning land/presence was (partially) fulfilled in the construction of the Temple and the placing of the ark in the Most Holy Place.

God's blessing "And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon" (v. 25). It even appeared that during the reign of Solomon the blessing of the nations (Gen 12:3) was being fulfilled, e.g. when the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon because of the fame of his wisdom.

3. The Failure of the Kings

Despite the promise of God, the kings of Israel failed.

- David "utterly scorned the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:14) in the matter of Bathsheba. This introduced rot into the kingdom from which it never recovered.
- Solomon "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD" (1 Kings 11:6) – he married many foreign wives and worshipped their gods (see prohibition in Deut. 17:17). He amassed both wealth and massive military hardware contrary to the prohibition in Deut. 17:16-17.
- After Solomon's death Israel was divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. None of the northern kings were good; only a few of the kings of Judah were upright.

Into this situation God sent the prophets who spoke in his name, speaking of the failure of the partial kingdom and pointing towards the future perfect kingdom.

God's Big Picture

6. The Prophesied Kingdom

We saw in the previous study that the expression of the Kingdom of God under the kings of Israel was only partial. The kings were mere men and their reigns were characterised by sin and failure. Even the good kings failed. Into this situation God sent his prophets who spoke of a future age in which the Kingdom would be perfected.

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	<u>The prophesied kingdom</u>
God's people...	The new community: the remnant of Israel, plus many from the nations
in God's presence...	The new creation
enjoying God's rule and blessing	Relationship perfectly restored under the new covenant

The "latter prophets" (Isaiah to Malachi) comprise about one quarter of the Old Testament. Their ministry was essentially twofold:

- to forth-tell, i.e. to apply the Law to present circumstances;
- to fore-tell, i.e. to point forward to the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham.

In this study we will take the promise of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) as our starting point, but we will have to refer to other prophecies. Jeremiah's promise of the new covenant fits the template of the Kingdom:

God's people "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD...I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33).

God's presence... "... will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts..." (Jer. 31:33).

God's blessing "And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me...For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34).

1. The New Community

Persistent disobedience led the people of God to disaster: the northern kingdom of Israel was sent into captivity by the Assyrian empire in 722 BC, and the southern kingdom of Judah went into Babylonian exile in 586 BC. The parallel with Adam being expelled from Eden is deliberate. So also is the way in which the prophets represented the restoration of Israel as a new Exodus:

“Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers” (Jer. 16:14-15).

Just as the Exodus entailed the creation of Israel as the people of God, so also this new Exodus would entail the creation of a new community.

Often this new community is represented as a remnant”. E.g. Isa. 10-20-21.

This new community would comprise not Israel alone, but also the Gentile nations, Isa. 49:6. Men and women from all nations would benefit from God’s acts to save Israel (Isa. 60:103).

2. The New Creation

The new community will inhabit the new creation. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Isa. 65:17-18).

This new creation is depicted by many of the prophets as a new Eden or a new Promised Land, e.g. “And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim” (Joel 3:18).

The restored temple is central to the new creation, e.g. Ezekiel 40-48. A river flows out of the temple in Ezekiel’s vision, bringing life to the world.

3. The New Covenant

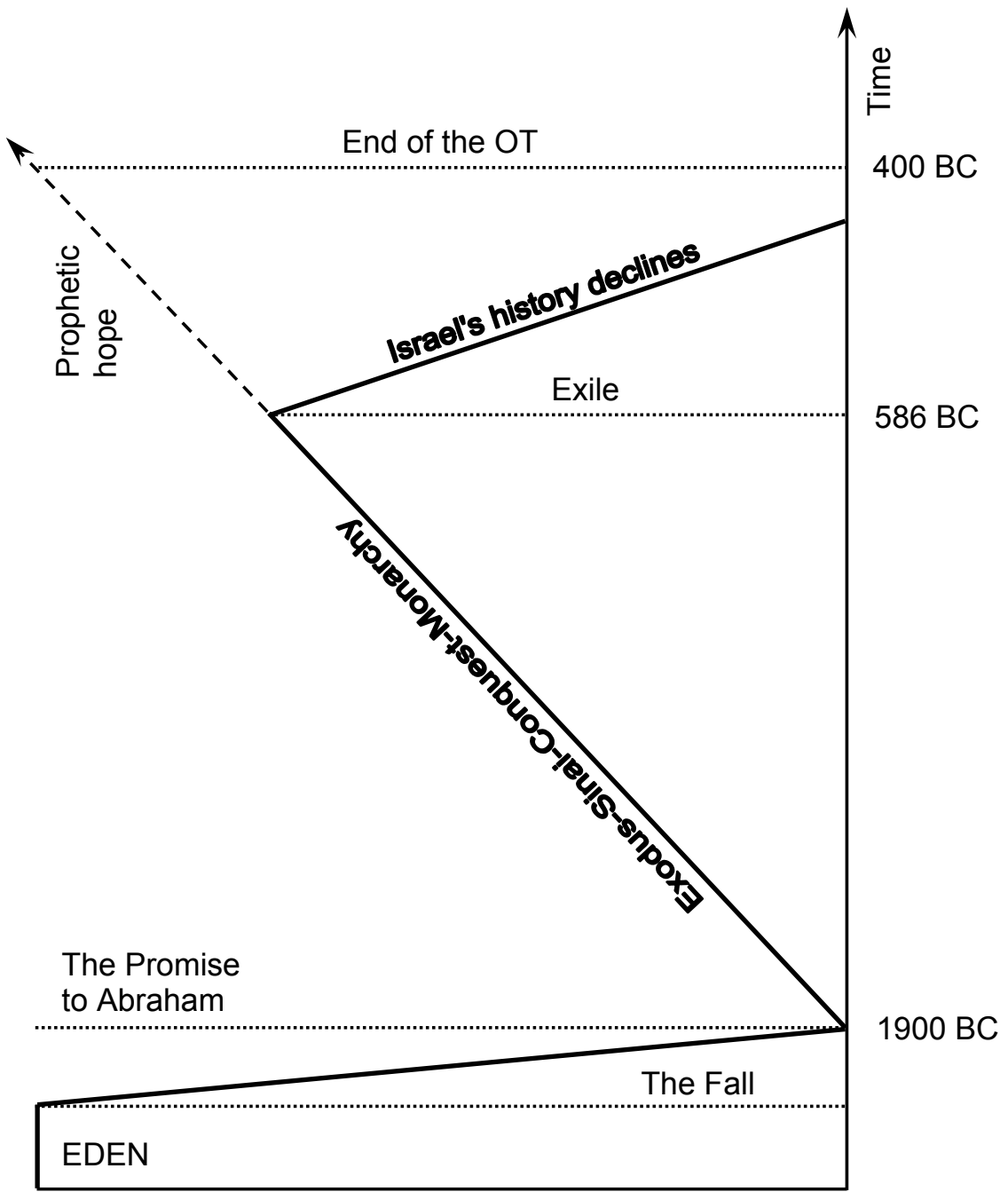
The kingdom must include a restoration of the relationship between God and his people. This is spoken of as the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34):

- the rule of God is willingly received by his people because his Law is written on their hearts;
- all his people have a personal knowledge of God;
- God will forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no longer.

The kingdom will have a king who will rule with perfect justice (Psalm 45:6-7; Isa. 9-6-7). This king is clearly no mere man.

In 538 BC Cyrus the Persian conquered the Babylonian empire and issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (completed 515 BC). However, only a handful did so, and when Ezra and Nehemiah ministered (458-420 BC) Jerusalem was still under-populated and choked with rubble. Fulfilment of the Prophesied Kingdom tarried many centuries.

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	<u>The pattern of the kingdom</u>	<u>The perished kingdom</u>	<u>The promised kingdom</u>	<u>The priestly kingdom</u>	<u>The partial kingdom</u>	<u>The prophesied kingdom</u>
God's people...	Adam and Eve	No one	Abraham's descendants	Aaron in the Tabernacle, and Israel camped around	The 12 Tribes of Israel	The new community: the remnant of Israel plus many from the nations
in God's presence...	God's fellowship in Eden	Driven from God's presence in Eden	Canaan	The Tabernacle, and especially the ark of the covenant	The land of Canaan, with the capital at Jerusalem and the Temple in Zion	The new creation
enjoying God's rule and blessing	God's Word; creation blessings expressed in perfect relationships	Relationships all broken; creation blessing lost; humanity dies	Blessing to Israel and the nations	Aaron bestowing blessing on Israel	Under the rule of David and his descendants	Relationship perfectly restored under the new covenant



God's Big Picture

7. Jesus Christ: The Present Kingdom

This study looks at how the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus fulfils the prophecies we looked at in the previous study. In summary, Jesus embodies the kingdom. At the start of his public ministry Jesus proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). What brought the kingdom "at hand"? The presence of Jesus. On another occasion he claimed, "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20), i.e. Jesus claimed that he himself was the kingdom of God present among the Jews.

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	<u>The pattern of the kingdom</u>	<u>The promised kingdom</u>	<u>The present kingdom</u>
God's people...	Adam and Eve	Abraham's descendants	Jesus Christ: new Adam; new Israel
in God's presence...	God's fellowship in Eden	Canaan	Jesus Christ: true Tabernacle; true Temple
enjoying God's rule and blessing	God's Word; creation blessings expressed in perfect relationships	Blessing to Israel and the nations	Jesus Christ: the Word incarnate, from whose fullness we have received grace upon grace

1. Jesus and Israel – God's People

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham...All the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations" (Matt. 1:1).

Jesus is presented as the fulfilment of Israel. The focus is all on him. We have seen this already in Gen. 12:7 and Gal. 3:16 – Jesus is the promised "seed" of Abraham to whom the promises were made.

"And [Jesus] went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him..." (Mark 3:13-14).

Jesus chooses 12 and gives them the unique designation "apostle" because Jacob had 12 sons who were uniquely the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus is founding "new Israel" with himself the head.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1).

Jesus is alluding to Isaiah 5 and the vineyard of the LORD which failed to produce the fruit for which God looked. The vine was a symbol of Israel. Jesus is saying that he was now the true Israel, the true people of God, and that he will produce the fruit God desired.

Jesus is “God’s people” and we must be “incorporated” into him to become subjects of the kingdom of God.

2. Jesus and the Temple – God’s Place

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The verb John uses for “dwelt” means “pitched his tent”. John is deliberately using a word which calls to mind the Tabernacle. Jesus “tabernacled” among us. This points to two truths:

(a) Jesus took a fully human nature in his incarnation. He was a unique person: both fully divine (the Word, the only Son from the Father), but also fully human (he became flesh like us and pitched his tent with us).

(b) Jesus’ fully human nature became the means by which God dwells among his people. As the only God-Man he became the meeting place between God and man: he became the fulfilment of the Temple. In reference to his body, he said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19).

3. Jesus and Moses – God’s Rule and Blessing

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:17-18).

God’s rule was expressed through the Law he gave to Moses; God’s blessing was promised to those who observed everything written in the Law. Jesus did not set aside the Law; he fulfilled it (Matt. 5:17). But this did not subordinate him to Moses. Rather he is vastly superior to Moses:

- Moses never saw God; the Son is at the Father’s side.
- The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus.

“And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Matt. 26:27-28).

The new covenant of which Jesus is Mediator is vastly superior to the covenant made with Israel through Moses (Hebrews 8:5-13).

The Gospel proclaims that the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ. To confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord” is to submit to his rule, receive his blessing (the forgiveness of sins), and through him have access to God.

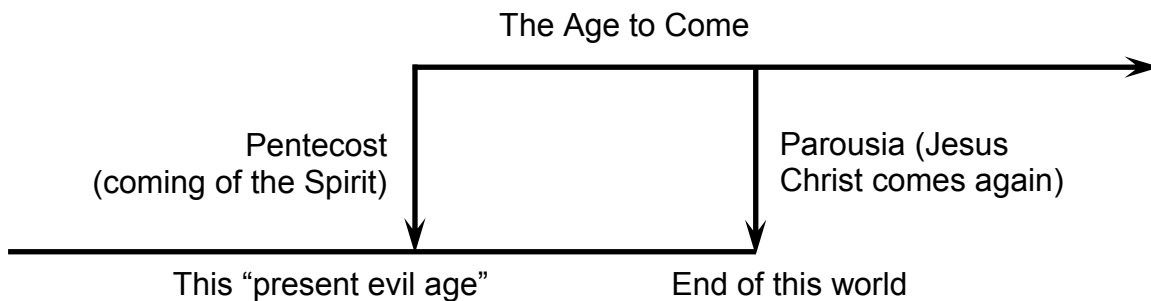
God's Big Picture

8. From Pentecost to Parousia: The Proclamation of the Kingdom

So far our studies have dealt with history: events that happened long ago in lands far away. In contrast this study is up-to-date. We are going to look at the Kingdom of God in its present form – the Kingdom as it is proclaimed by the Gospel.

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	<u>The promised kingdom</u>	<u>The present kingdom</u>	<u>The proclaimed kingdom</u>
God's people...	Abraham's descendants	Jesus Christ: new Adam; new Israel	The Church: Jews and Gentiles are all one in Jesus Christ
in God's presence...	Canaan	Jesus Christ: true Tabernacle; true Temple	The Church and the individual believer are indwelt by the Holy Spirit
enjoying God's rule and blessing	Blessing to Israel and the nations	Jesus Christ: the Word incarnate, from whose fullness we have received grace upon grace	The Church is the community in which God's rule and blessing are known (Jesus is "head over all things for the church")

We are living between Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit) and the Parousia (the coming again of Jesus). This is a unique period of time.



1. The Gospel commission is patterned on the Kingdom

The King commissions the heralds of the kingdom: "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore...'" (Matt. 28:18).

God's people "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). The kingdom is to be populated by people from all nations.

Under God's rule "...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20a). God's rule is expressed through his Word.

In God's presence "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20b). The King is not absent; he is with his people. Notice that the commission is "to the end of the age"; the proclamation of the Kingdom is only until the parousia.

2. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit brings the Kingdom

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church is the outstanding characteristic of the present period of time. This commenced on the day of Pentecost: Peter said, "But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh..." (Acts 2:16-17).

(a) The Holy Spirit marks out God's people

By the new birth: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

By confession: "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).

(b) The Holy Spirit makes God's people his dwelling place

The Church: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16).

Each believer: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19).

(c) The Holy Spirit communicates God's blessing

The ministry of the Holy Spirit causes the "age to come" to break into the "present evil age".

"...those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come..." (Heb. 6:4-5).

The Church is the only community on the face of the earth in which the Holy Spirit lives and works. The Church is the sphere within which the Kingdom of God operates. The Church is created by the Kingdom; displays the life of the Kingdom; and proclaims the gospel of the Kingdom. Membership of the Church is the believer's highest privilege.

But this is only for the present. Jesus Christ will come again and then the Kingdom of God will be perfected.

God's Big Picture

9. Consummation: The Perfected Kingdom

The Gospel proclamation of the Kingdom is only until “the end of the age”. At the parousia (the coming again of the Lord Jesus) the Kingdom will be perfected. This is depicted for us most clearly in the book of Revelation.

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	<u>The present kingdom</u>	<u>The proclaimed kingdom</u>	<u>The perfected kingdom</u>
God's people...	Jesus Christ: new Adam; new Israel	The Church: Jews and Gentiles are all one in Jesus Christ	A great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages (Rev. 7:9)
in God's presence...	Jesus Christ: true Tabernacle; true Temple	The Church and the individual believer are indwelt by the Holy Spirit	The holy city, new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-3)
enjoying God's rule and blessing	Jesus Christ: the Word incarnate, from whose fullness we have received grace upon grace	The Church is the community in which God's rule and blessing are known	The river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life (Rev. 22:1-2)

Revelation tells us about the events that characterise the present period of time – the time between the first and second comings of the Son of God. This study will not deal with what Revelation has to say about this period of history. Instead we will look at what it tells us about the perfection of the Kingdom of God.

1. The people of God are a great multitude

John's vision of history between the two comings of the Son of God opens in Revelation 4-5 with a vision of the throne of God, and the appearance of the Lamb, and the unrolling of the scroll of God's plan for history. At the heart of this plan for history is the people of God and the kingdom of God:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

The theme of the great multitude ransomed from “every tribe, language, people and nation” is picked up again and again, especially in the 144,000 described in Revelation 7. $144,000 = 12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10$. This is a symbolic number which

represents totality, perfection. This is ALL the people of God – no one is missing. They are “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” who stand “before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” and who cry “out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev 7:9-10).

The promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:3) has been fulfilled.

2. The presence of God is in the holy city

Revelation closes with a vision of “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

The key characteristic of this city is that God is there: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’... And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:3,22).

The city is God’s place – it comes down from heaven (Rev. 21:1), i.e. God is its Maker. We expect to find echoes of Eden – and we are not disappointed – Rev. 22:1-2 says that there is a river (c.f. Gen. 2:10) and the tree of life (c.f. Gen. 2:9).

The city has perfect dimensions: 12,000 stadia×12,000 stadia ×12,000 stadia. It is a cube – which reminds us of the Holy of Holies. 12,000 stadia is about 1,500 miles and so represents the size of the world known by the cultures of the Mediterranean, i.e. the holy city is world-encompassing.

3. The throne of God sends out the life-giving river

The picture of the Kingdom of God only needs God’s rule and blessing to be complete – and we find this in the throne of God. God’s throne opens this major section of Revelation (chapters 4-5) and it closes it (Rev. 22:1).

Notice that blessing (in the form of the river of the water of life and the tree of life) flows from the Throne through the city, i.e. the rule of God and the blessing of God are found together in the single picture of the throne of God.

Notice also that the people of God reign: “They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Rev 22:5). The priestly kingdom (Ex. 19:6; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) has come into its fullness.

The Kingdom is now perfected: complete (no one is missing), and imperishable (it will never end). This is the Christian hope. It is for this that we look longingly. Appropriately, Scripture closes with repeated emphasis on the coming again of Jesus (Rev. 22:7, 12, 17, 20). “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

<u>The kingdom of God</u>	God's people... in God's presence ... enjoying God's rule and blessing	<u>The pattern of the kingdom</u>	Adam and Eve God's fellowship in Eden God's Word; creation blessings expressed in perfect relationships	<u>The perished kingdom</u>	No one Driven from God's presence in Eden Relationships all broken; creation blessing lost; humanity dies	<u>The promised kingdom</u>	Abraham's descendants Canaan Blessing to Israel and the nations	<u>The priestly kingdom</u>	Aaron in Tabernacle, and Israel camped around Tabernacle, and especially the ark of the covenant Aaron bestowing blessing on Israel	<u>The partial kingdom</u>	The 12 Tribes of Israel Land of Canaan, with capital Jerusalem & Temple in Zion Under the rule of David and his descendants	<u>The prophesied kingdom</u>	The new community Remnant of Israel plus many from the nations The new creation Relationship perfectly restored under the new covenant	<u>The present kingdom</u>	Jesus Christ: new Adam; new Israel Jesus Christ: true Tabernacle; true Temple Jesus Christ: the Word incarnate, whose fullness we have received upon grace	<u>The proclaimed kingdom</u>	The Church: Jews and Gentiles are all one in Jesus Christ Church and individual believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit The Church is the community in which God's rule and blessing are known	<u>The perfected kingdom</u>	A great multitude from every nation, tribe and people & language The holy city, new Jerusalem The river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb; & on either side of the river, the tree of life
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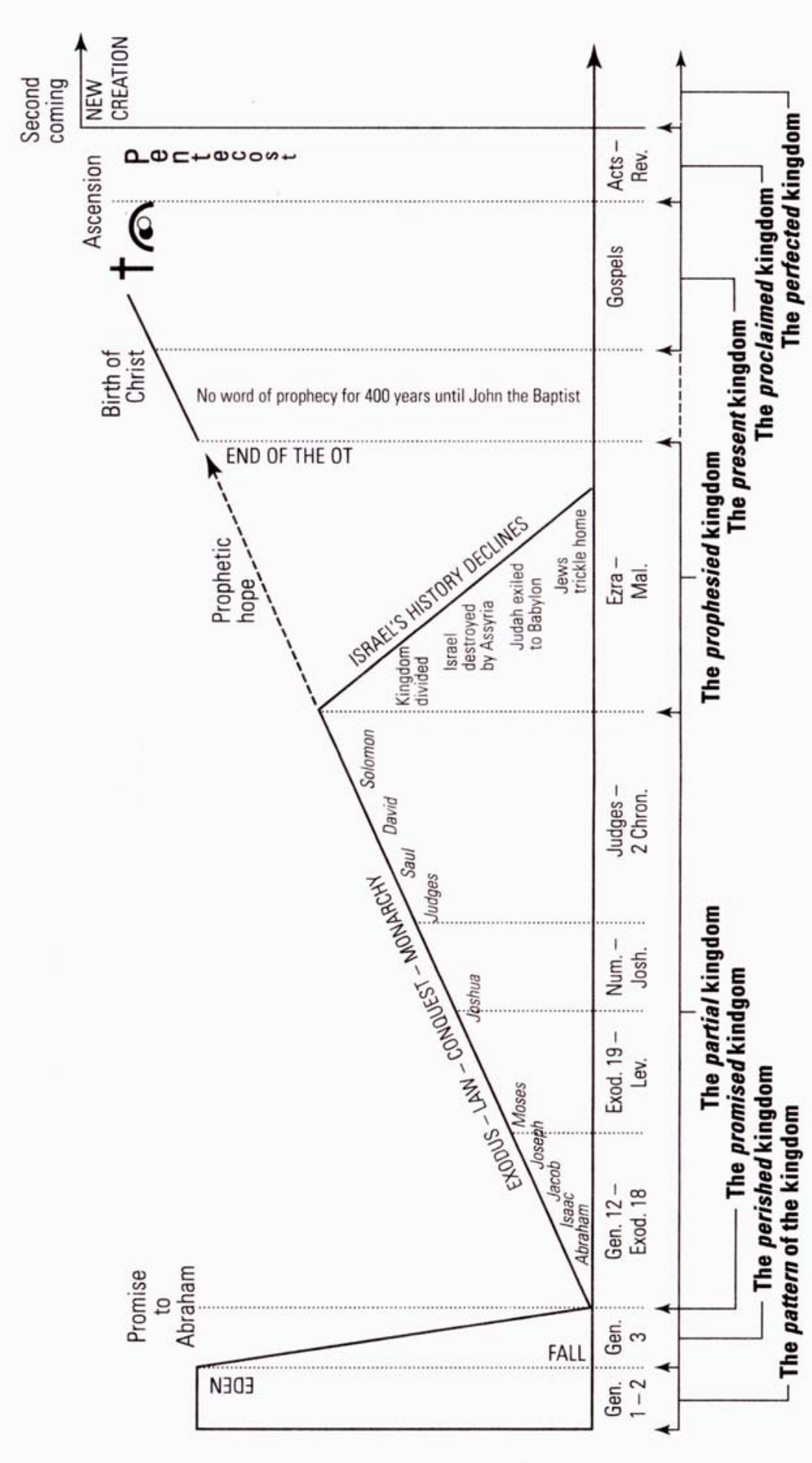


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