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A Resurrection Postlude

Acts 1:1-3

Introduction

All the Gospels conclude with the story of the resurrection. Matthew and Mark also include the Great Commission Jesus gave before He ascended. Mark and Luke add a brief description of the ascension, Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53. John concludes with an account of the resurrection and a description of the appearance of Jesus to His disciples in Galilee.

Luke wrote his Gospel sometime between AD 59 and 61. In AD 63 he added the Book of Acts as an early history of the spread of Christianity among the Jews and Gentiles. He opens Acts with a statement of the activities of Jesus during His last forty days on earth between resurrection Sunday and His ascension, which occurred ten days before Pentecost. Luke says that Jesus gave commandments and teachings to the disciples during those days, Acts 1:2.

Jesus presented "many infallible proofs" as a witness for all to see, Acts 1:3a. While we do not know all of those irrefutable "proofs," we know they surely included at least eight elements: (1) His fulfillment of all the promises of God, 2 Cor 1:20; (2) the empty tomb which He had vacated by the power of the resurrection, leaving the linen wrappings undisturbed, Luke 24:6-7, 12; John 20:7; (3) the resurrection appearances to many different people, 1 Cor 15:5-8; (4) the changed lives of the disciples, who had fled in fear when Jesus was arrested, Matt 26:56; see Acts 4:11-12; (5) the existence and spread of the early church in the power of the promised Holy Spirit, Acts 2:1-47; (6) the shift in worship for the Gentile church from the Sabbath to the "Lord's Day," Acts 20:7; (7) the dramatic change in the life of Saul who became Paul, the Apostle, Acts 9:1-30; and finally (8) the affirmations of the Jewish and Roman historians, Josephus Flavius (*Antiquities*, XVIII, iii, 3), Tacitus (*Annals* xv, 44), and Pliny the Younger, (*Letters* X. xcvi).

Luke then adds that for the forty days that Jesus was with the disciples, He spent time "speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," Acts 1:3b. Exactly what did He teach them during these days of instruction? We can only surmise the "things pertaining to the kingdom of God," but we do have some clear indications in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments, that give us more than an educated guess. Let us examine the teaching of the Kingdom of God that the two testaments present for us, and thus we can know the basis for Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom of God and be prepared to accept and proclaim it.

Jesus' Teaching Based on the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament

Jesus doubtless used the Old Testament as a resource for much of His teaching, just as He revealed His teaching with the disciples in Luke 24:27, 44. The Old Testament has much to say about the Kingdom of God. There are at least eight aspects of the Kingdom that are presented in the Old Testament.

- 1. The Theocratic Kingdom** - This is both implicit and explicit recognition of the reign of God as King of His creation that pervades the whole Old Testament. The concept emerges in implicit form in the first chapter of Genesis, where God is presented as the Creator-Lord and Monarch of the universe. Genesis 1:1-31 contains what has been called the "Ten Commandments of Creation." The use of "Let there be . . ." and ". . . there was" in Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, and 28 are all jussive of command statements. By implication these verses present God as Creator-Lord and King who is commanding His created order to respond to His commands in the formation of the universe, as we know it. Later Moses made explicit what is implied in Genesis 1, when he wrote his song for the victory at the Red Sea that is recorded in Exodus 15:1-18. This song closes in 15:18 with the statement that "the Lord shall reign [as king] forever and ever."
- 2. The United Kingdom of Israel** - The desire for an earthly king became an issue during the time of the Judges. Judges 1-16 is anti-monarchical, especially Judges 8 and 9 (8:23; 9:1ff), while Judges 17-24 is pro-monarchical (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The desire for a human king was based on two ideas. First, all the other nations had a human, visible king who sat on the throne of government and was a military leader, while Israel's king, Yahweh, was invisible. Second, Israel believed if they had a human king he would bring order to society in a time of growing anarchy. The desire for a human king came to a head during the early days of Samuel's leadership (1 Sam 8:1-22). While Samuel was reluctant to allow the people to have a human king, God intervened and allowed it with a strong warning about the consequences (18:11-18).
- 3. The Divided Kingdom of Israel-Judah** - From the time of the divided kingdom, there was continued decline morally, spiritually, economically, militarily, culturally, and geographically in every aspect of the national life of Israel and Judah. The fact that God visited judgment and held evil kings accountable was further evidence that He considered all kings to be vassals under His divine authority. God viewed their rebellions as a rejection of His will resulting in immorality, apostasy, idolatry, etc. All of this finally

resulted in the fall of Samaria, the capitol of Israel in 722 BC and the fall of Judah and Jerusalem in 586 BC.

4. **The Exiled Kingdom** - The exile did not dampen hope of a return of the rule of God. During the Babylonian exile, the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of the resurrection of the nation after the exile (Ezek 37:1-14) and a permanent reunification of the nation under one king (37:15-28). Jeremiah had clearly stated that the nation would go captive for 70 years as a judgment for their rebellions against God (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10-11). Also from the exile in Babylon, Daniel envisioned the coming King and the coming Kingdom of God (Dan 7:9, 13, 22; 9:24-27).
5. **The Restored Kingdom** - Kingdom theology after the exile continued to blossom, especially during the ministry of Zechariah and Malachi. This was true even though the restored Israel was always under the thumb of the reigning world power. First, it was subject to the Medo-Persian empire, then to Greece under Alexander, and finally to Rome until the Diaspora in AD 70. Ezekiel also saw a time when the return to the land would be permanent and result in a time of peace and prosperity (Ezek 34:23-31; 36:16-38). These apocalyptic visionaries changed the hope from a hope of revival to a hope of a revolutionary new world order.
6. **The Messianic Kingdom** - In Daniel's wonderful vision of the coming King and the coming Kingdom of God in chapter 7, he identifies various aspects of the kingdom in verse 14. The Father presents the Kingdom to the Son, who will establish an eternal reign that will restore the hope of the ideals of the reign of David as foreseen by the prophets in Isaiah 2:2-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 65:17-25; 66:1-24; Ezekiel 40:1 - 48:35; and Zechariah 12:1 - 14:21.
7. **The Millennial Kingdom** - The vision of Ezekiel 40-48 was given to assure the Hebrews of a future restoration. It also tells us that God invites all people to become part of His coming Kingdom. Part of what He promised was realized when Israel returned after the exile, part has been realized in the return of Israel in 1948. Another part will be realized in the establishment of the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus. The full and complete fulfillment will come as all gives way to the establishment of His eternal Kingdom. There are three aspects of the coming Kingdom of God that Ezekiel saw in this vision. He saw the new Temple (40:1 - 43:27), a new form of worship (44:1 - 46:24), and a new quality of life (47:1 - 48:35).
8. **The Eternal Kingdom** - The following passages are representative of the fact that the eternal Kingdom of God indeed is a pervasive concept found

throughout the Old Testament. Indeed, the rule of God begins in *Genesis 1* and is confirmed as everlasting throughout the Word of God, and the Bible concludes with the triumph of His everlasting Kingdom in *Revelation 22:1-21*. The following passages are representative of the idea of God's everlasting Kingdom and its pervasive influence over every other manifestation of the Kingdom of God. The passages are *Exodus 15:18*; *Psalm 145:13*; *Proverbs 8:23*; *Isaiah 9:6*; *Jeremiah 10:10*; *Ezekiel 37:26*; *Daniel 7:14*; *Amos 9:11-15*; *Micah 5:2*; and *Habakkuk 1:12*.

Jesus' Teaching of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament

While we have no record of the exact words of Jesus' teaching during this forty-day period mentioned in *Acts 1:1-3*, we do have a large body of evidence that Jesus left concerning the Kingdom of God. One of the main themes of Jesus' teaching and preaching was the Kingdom. The following is a list of the main points included in Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom. He most certainly would have reinforced and expanded on these themes during those last forty days with His disciples.

1. Jesus began His ministry teaching about the good news of the *Gospel of the Kingdom of God*, *Mark 1:14-15*; *Luke 8:1*.
2. Repentance and faith in the *Gospel* are the keys for entrance into the Kingdom of God, *Mark 1:15b*.
3. The Sermon on the Mount was filled with teaching about the Kingdom of God. The Beatitudes in *Matthew 5:1-12* are a litany of characteristics which should describe a kingdom citizen.
4. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God should be a priority for every believer, *Matt 6:33*. As such it is an antidote to worry and failure to trust God with all our needs, see *Luke 9:60, 62*; *12:31*.
5. Jesus also set forth the character of the Kingdom of God in *Matthew 6:33* as a Kingdom that mirrors the righteousness of the King.
6. The righteous Kingdom of God is the antithesis to the unrighteous kingdom of darkness ruled by the adversary, *Matt 12:25-30*.
7. For those who are committed to the things of this world, the Kingdom of God is difficult to enter, *Matt 19:24*; *21:31*; *Mark 10:23-25*; *Luke 18:23-25*.
8. Those who do not receive the Kingdom lose access to the Kingdom of God and the King, *Matt 21:42-43*.
9. The Kingdom of God is a great mystery understood only by a believer and revealed in the parables of the Kingdom, *Matt 13:18-23, 24-30, 31-32, 33, 44, 45-46, 47-52*; *Mark 4:11, 26, 30*; *Luke 8:10*. The Kingdom of God is compared to a farmer sowing seed, a farmer whose enemy sowed tares among the grain, a mustard seed that grows into a tree, leaven that

- permeates the dough, a treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great price, and a dragnet that catches fish.
10. The Kingdom of God is a powerful Kingdom as revealed by Jesus at His transfiguration, Mark 9:1, 47; Matt 16:28-17:13.
 11. Only those who possess child-like faith can enter the Kingdom of God, Matt 19:13-15; Mark 10:14-15; Luke 18:15-17.
 12. Close only counts in hand grenades and horseshoes, but not with the Kingdom of God, Mark 12:34; Acts 26:28. It is reserved for believers only, Mark 14:22-26; John 3:3-5; Jas 2:5..
 13. The least of those in the Kingdom of God are greater than John the Baptist, John 7:28.
 14. Those who reject the offer of the Kingdom of God will be judged severely, Luke 10:11-12.
 15. The Kingdom of God will include people from all nations, Luke 13:29; Rev 14:6.
 16. The Kingdom of God at present is internal, within the heart and life of a believer, Luke 17:21. One day it will be revealed to all, Rev 6:14.
 17. The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, Rom 14:17.
 18. The Kingdom of God is for the pure in heart, Matt 5:8; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5.
 19. The Kingdom of God is for those who suffer persecution and tribulation and who endure to receive the righteous justice of God's Kingdom, 2 Thess 1:4-5.
 20. The Kingdom of God along with the kingdoms of this world, ultimately, will be given to Christ Jesus, Rev 11:15; 12:10.

The Kingdom of God is His rule over all creation. The church and the Kingdom are not the same, but the church is a part of the Kingdom of God. The church is to be a witness of the coming Kingdom and call people to prepare for its coming, Matt 24:14. The power and authority of the Kingdom are vested in the life of believers, Matt 10:7-8. The keys to the Kingdom are found in faith and commitment to Jesus, Matt 16:17-20; Eph 2:4-9.

Conclusion

As the refrain of the great old hymn written by Mary Slade says, "The Kingdom is coming, O tell ye the story, God's banner exalted shall be! The earth shall be full of His knowledge and glory, as waters that cover the sea." In His own grand invitation Jesus has invited you and me to sit down together with Him in the Kingdom. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say come. Whoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely," Rev 22:17.