

Essential Bible Teachings

7. The Kingdom of God on Earth (Part 2)

Previously we found that any kingdom is made up of 4 fundamental elements that must exist at the same time - a king/queen, a territory, a people and a constitution. To resume the thread of this study we must now address the 3rd and 4th of these subjects.

3. The people The fundamental question that must occupy us now is who are the inhabitants of this 'Kingdom of God'? I've already informed you that I'm British, I was born here, and so I'm entitled to carry a British passport. And I can use it to confirm my identity. I belong here, which gives me many privileges, but also brings with it many responsibilities.

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were freed from their slavery in Egypt and began a journey out of Egypt to the land of Canaan = Israel. They made a long stopover at Sinai, and once there, God spoke to them in a striking way:

Now if you will listen to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be mine among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5/6)

God invites them to belong to Him, to become His special people. That's why He separated them from their environment of slavery, to give them the opportunity to behave as God's special people - to respect Him, obey Him, worship Him. Their history according to the Bible shows us that they were not content to remain a 'separate' people for God - they preferred to become like their neighbours, as in this quotation of some words addressed by the Israelites to Samuel:

Now set over us a king to judge us, as there are among all the nations. (1 Samuel 8:5)

God called them to be different from the others, to follow higher, nobler ways, but they preferred to be the same as the others.

And now notice how this language of separation and of being God's special people reappears in the New Testament:

You, on the contrary, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people, that you may proclaim the virtues of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light, who once were not a people, but now are God's people, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:9/10).

But it's no longer the nation of Israel who are the beneficiaries of what God has said here - rather, it's all those who have made the personal choice to abandon their natural state = sinners destined to live briefly and then die eternally, but rather to belong to God in the way chosen by Him = baptism followed by new life (the subject of our next article, God willing). Paul emphasized this distinction of state in his great treatise on the resurrection, which we have already considered. But let's revisit this 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, to find a relevant emphasis:

For since death came by a man, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. And as all die in Adam, even so all will live again in Christ, but each in his own order. Christ as the firstfruits, then those who belong to Christ, at his coming. (v21-23)

"In Adam...in Christ.....those who belong to Christ". All are in Adam - there's no choice about that, because of our birth as human beings. But not all are in Christ - only those who have made the choice to belong to him. They alone are the citizens of the Kingdom of God - those who await the arrival of their heavenly King - *"at his coming"*.

4. The Constitution Any society needs a framework of laws, to regulate the daily lives of its members. For the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, this was what is usually referred to as the Law of Moses - the contents of the books of Exodus (from chapter 19 onwards), Leviticus and Numbers. But citizens of the Kingdom of God no longer need to follow these physical rites and ceremonies, such as sacrifices and feasts. All these things were necessary at the time, to prepare them for a higher way. In the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, we find this 'higher way'. Matthew gives us the account of what is known as "The Sermon on the Mount" (chapters 5 to 7). And time and again during this discourse we read:

You have heard that it was said.....but I say to you.

The teachings of the Lord and the Apostles give us everything we need to direct the daily lives of those who belong to God today, while awaiting the

future day chosen by God to send His Son back here to earth, to establish the Kingdom of God. Here are 2 quotes from Acts:

And as (the Apostles) were looking up to heaven while (Jesus) was going away, behold, two men dressed in white appeared to them, and said: Men of Galilee, why do you keep looking up to heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from among you into heaven, will come just as you saw him go into heaven. (1 :10/11)

God, regardless of times of ignorance, now announces to all men everywhere that they must repent, because he has appointed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness, through the man he has appointed, of which He has given certain proof to all by raising Him from the dead. (17 :31)

It is a consistent teaching in the Bible that Jesus - who was to live as a man of flesh like the rest of us - conquered sin and thus death, according to the prophecy about him before his birth addressed to Joseph. But this was only the first phase of his ministry. Jesus is to return to earth, to sit on the throne destined for him, and to transform this world full of wickedness so that it is filled with the knowledge of God's glory. He is already our King, if we are willing to acknowledge his authority and destiny, and give him our loyalty daily.

If it is truly here on earth that God's great plan will be realized, then it goes without saying that no one should expect that at the moment of their death they will ascend to heaven to live an idyllic life, or descend to a hell to suffer there. *God has appointed a day*, and for those who belong to Him, even if they die before that day can have full confidence that they will be resurrected to share in God's Kingdom - here on earth.