

The Kingdom Article IX

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 3:2; 4:8-10,23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52; 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Romans 5:17; 8:19; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 11:10,16; 12:28; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 4:13; Revelation 1:6,9; 5:10; 11:15; 21-22.

Key Text:

Genesis 1:1: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah 9:6-7: For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Matthew 3:2: and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

Matthew 12:28: But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Matthew 13:1-52

Matthew 25:31-46

Matthew 26:29: But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Mark 1:14-15: Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Mark 9:1: And He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”

Luke 12:31-32: But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Luke 17:20-21: Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Luke 23:42-43: Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

John 3:3: Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 18:36: Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

Acts 1:6-7 (8): Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

1 Corinthians 15:24-28: Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. For “*He has put all things under His feet.*” But when He says “all things are put under *Him,*” *it is* evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Colossians 1:13: He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Hebrews 12:28: Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

1 Peter 2:9-10: But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Revelation 1:6, 9: and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 11:15: Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”

Revelation 21-22

Exposition

The kingdom of God is a multi-faceted concept in the Bible. It is a realm and a reign. It is both “now” and “not yet!” The song “Blessed Assurance” captures well this truth and tension.

The 1963 and 2000 *BF&M* statements on the kingdom of God are identical. Upon a cursory glance, the biblical passages which are listed along with the statement reveal much detail about the kingdom of God.

The greatest concentration of references is from the Gospels, including seven consecutive chapters of Matthew alone (chapters 4-10). The references from the remainder of the New Testament are less numerous, many dealing with the consummation of the kingdom.

The Old Testament references are sparse because the phrase “kingdom of God” does not occur there as such. This does not negate the fact that the idea is present. The greatest concentration again occurs in the Gospels because the kingdom of God was the favorite theme of Jesus, occurring over 100 times in his teachings.

The *BF&M* statement is a succinct summary of the major Biblical teachings on God’s kingdom. A line by line examination is instructive.

“The kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe...”

As Creator, God is absolute ruler over his universe (Gen 1:1). Many Old Testament passages speak of this sovereignty in terms of God's being King (Pss 47:2; 103:19). The New Testament likewise often refers to the dominion of God as Creator (cp. Acts 17:22-31).

“...and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King.”

In the Bible, God's “kingdom” does not refer so much to a place as it does to a rule – God's dominion over the lives of individuals. It is not a worldly kingdom (John 18:36). Hence, for Matthew the terms “kingdom of Heaven” and “kingdom of God” are synonymous.

The rule of God in people's lives was a favorite theme of Jesus' teaching (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 12:31). He taught that it is near – as near as the individual's response to his message (Matt 3:2; 12:28). He emphasized how it was “within” the hearts of individuals and the community of disciples who embraced God's rule over their lives (Luke 17:20-21).

The kingdom was Jesus' favorite subject for his parables; and through them, he taught its many aspects (cp. Matt 13: 1-52). Later New Testament writers emphasized that the kingdom consists of believers who accept the rule of God in their lives through the atoning work of Christ (Rom 5:17; Col 1:13; Rev 1:9).

“Particularly the kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ.”

The connection between the kingdom and salvation is already present in the teachings of Jesus (John 3:3). It is found throughout the New Testament, though often not in explicit “kingdom language.” Believers constitute a special kind of kingdom subject. They are a kingdom of priests (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10). They both reign and serve.

“Christians ought to pray and to labor that the kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth.”

This statement obviously alludes to the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:10). Interestingly, this text is not listed in article IX. Now, one must be careful not to misinterpret it. We do not bring the kingdom by our own effort. God's sovereignty is eternal, and he brings his kingdom to us as he draws near us in mercy and love through our response to Christ (Mark 1:14-15). On the other hand, a life of committed Christian service is the sure sign that one belongs to the kingdom's "flock" (Matt 25:31-46).

“The full consummation of the kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.”

The kingdom of God is eternal. It manifests itself at present in the lives of believers. It will be fully consummated in the future.

The future dimension of the kingdom is already implicit in the Old Testament promises of an eternal reign of the Messianic King (Isa 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-7). Jesus also spoke of that further time when he would sit at a table in the Father's kingdom with all his disciples (Matt 26:29).

At the end of time, all God's enemies will be vanquished, and the reign of the Lord Christ and God the Father will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:24-28; Acts 1:6-7; Rev 11:15). This future kingdom will be an abiding city for all believers – a new heaven and a new earth, where all the sorrows and imperfections of this life have disappeared (Rom 8:18-21; Heb 11:10, 16; Rev 21-22).

Theological Observations

Baptist confessions of faith historically neglected to include a separate article on the Kingdom of God. *The First and Second London Confessions* briefly mention the Kingdom in connection with the kingly office of Christ. *The New Hampshire Confession* (1833), the forerunner to the *BF&M*, did not include an article on the Kingdom.

Further, confessional statements from other nationalities (British, German, Swedish) failed to address the subject of the Kingdom. Historical developments within 19th century American life explain the inclusion of an article on the Kingdom in the *BF&M* 1925. During the latter part of the 19th century, American Protestant liberalism attempted to “bring in” the Kingdom of God through a movement known as the Social Gospel.

Given the prominence of the Kingdom motif in the life and ministry of Jesus, one might expect the *BF&M* to locate the article on the Kingdom after the article on God. The *BF&M*, however, properly locates the article on the Kingdom between the articles on the church and last things. The church is not the Kingdom, yet the church witnesses to the Kingdom. The consummation of the Kingdom awaits the personal return of Christ. The *BF&M* highlights several theological aspects of the Kingdom.

First, according to the *BF&M*, the Kingdom of God is cosmic. The *BF&M* states, “The Kingdom of God includes ... His general sovereignty over the universe.” Again, although the phrase “kingdom of God” does not occur in the Old Testament, the concept of God’s Kingdom is central to the Old Testament. God reigns as King over the cosmos in his role as Creator. The Psalms, in particular, celebrate the Creator’s kingship.

Second, according to the *BF&M*, the Kingdom of God is Christocentric. The *BF&M* highlights the Christocentric nature of the Kingdom by noting that people enter the Kingdom by faith in Christ and the Kingdom consummation at the return of Christ. According to George Beasley-Murray, former professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Jesus is the “Contender for,” “Initiator of,” “Instrument of,” “Representative of,” “Mediator of,” “Bearer of,” and “Revealer of” the Kingdom. At his trial, Jesus claimed that his Kingdom did not operate based on worldly principles (John 18:36). The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Christ (Eph.

5:5; Col. 1:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:11). God the Father gave the Son a Kingdom (Lk. 22:29) over which the Son will rule until He defeats all enemies. Then the Son willingly returns the Kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24).

Daniel 7 detailed the demise of godless kingdoms through a figure noted as the Son of Man who receives an everlasting kingdom comprised of every people and language group (Dan. 7:9-14). The angel Gabriel announced the forthcoming birth of one who receives the throne of David (Lk. 1:32-33). Jesus' earliest sermons addressed the topic of the Kingdom (Mk. 1:15). Our Lord taught the arrival of the Kingdom with the advent of His ministry (Mk. 1:15; Lk. 11:16). His healing miracles and exorcisms, in particular, testify to the arrival of the King and His Kingdom. The parables often focused on some aspect of the Kingdom, including the growth of the Kingdom between the advents or two comings (Matt. 13).

Third, according to the *BF&M*, the Kingdom of God is soteriological. The *BF&M* emphasizes this aspect of the Kingdom in two ways. First, Kingdom subjects willfully acknowledge God as King. More importantly, "the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ." Further, according to Jesus, a birth from above is a prerequisite for entrance into the Kingdom (John 3:5). Salvation involves a kingdom transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:13). Salvation, therefore, is more than salvation of individual souls; the imagery of God's particular rule over saved Kingdom citizens depicts the communal nature of the kingdom.

Fourth, according to the *BF&M*, the Kingdom of God has a consummation. The *BF&M* states, "The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Christ..." The return of Christ consummates God's redemptive plan and results in final judgment (Matt 25:31-46), resurrection (1 Cor. 15:50-57), and the transformation of the created order (Matt. 19:28).

In summary, the Kingdom of God is both present and future, already inaugurated yet not fully consummated. The Kingdom is the reign of God over people, yet, for some, such as myself, the Kingdom culminates in a realm during an earthly reign of Christ called the millennium (Rev 20:1-6). All believers, regardless of eschatological view, must obediently pray as our Lord taught us, “Thy Kingdom come.” In confidence we know it will!

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