



The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept & Its Meaning for the Church

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This book traces the history of the biblical idea of the Kingdom of God and suggests its contemporary relevance. "To grasp what is meant by the Kingdom of God is to come very close to the heart of the Bible's gospel of salvation."--from the Preface

The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept & Its Meaning for the Church Details

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M says

Surprisingly well written. I do not expect theology books to use such dramatic metaphors. The author keeps us tuned in by frequently writing from the viewpoint of antagonists in scripture and does a remarkable job of bringing out social and political movements (from the Old Testament in particular). Bright's theology of the kingdom has a few holes, but stands strong as a whole, especially considering it was published 60 years ago. This might have been a five star review had the author not found it necessary to take a divisive stand on the old arguments between our Covenant and Dispensational systems of theology in the latter half of the book.

Jon Robinson says

Stating the “Kingdom of God” is not only the good news Jesus preached, but also the Bible’s overall theme is one thing.

Specifically demonstrating how the many fine historical, cultural, literary, and theological details of the Old Testament weave this theme together and then continue transitioning to how Jesus fulfills this theme in the New Testament is quite another.

John Bright manages to do this with great thoughtfulness and care. While he brings the Old Testament’s narrative and theology to life in a detailed way some may think tedious, it doesn’t necessarily have to be seen that way. The content he shares is indispensable and would greatly benefit any Christian by connecting the Bible story’s dots in ways they’ve never known. For anyone who has ever flipped through the pages of the Bible while wondering why and how it matters (especially the Major/Minor Prophet literature), this book provides that much needed insight.

He demonstrates how God’s promise to Abram to make his descendants into a great people through whom the world will come to be blessed finds the start of its fulfillment in the covenant God made with Israel to make them into a “kingdom of priests”. He recounts how their failure to keep that covenant and its mission incited God’s promise to establish his righteousness and rule through a servant whose suffering and sacrifice would ordain a new covenant his true kingdom people would embody. In addition, by focusing on the intertestamental period of post-exile, the Hellenization of the world, the Jews’ emphasis and fencing of the Law, the Maccabean revolt, and the subsequent Roman occupation, he sheds much needed light on that so-called “silent period” to show how God was yet working His will within often ignored historical moments to set up the context of the Messiah’s eventual appearing. His splendid discussion of Jesus’ ministry is mostly spent examining how the Church’s mission, as God’s Kingdom people, is to proclaim and embody his rule and righteousness as both a present and eschatological hope.

If any drawback to the book could be named, it would be that Bright doesn’t spend much time discussing precisely how the Church is supposed to do that, save for “Be the Church”, which he acknowledges is playing with words. That can be forgiven, however, since Bright’s purpose here is only to offer a detailed overview clarifying the Bible’s overall theme. How we might specifically “Be the Church” is a challenge Bright leaves with the reader to discern through Scriptural-shaped convictions how to answer Christ’s call to embody the life of the Kingdom citizen.

One aspect that continually amused me throughout the book was that, despite being first published in 1953,

much of what he wrote seems as pertinent today as it did then. Regardless of how archaic we deem it, history still keeps coming back around. While that may be a point of dread for many, for those who might understand how Christ's Kingdom rule is God's consummating will moving with and towards history, that may indeed be good news.

Robert Iannuccilli says

An Historical look at the Unfolding and Coming of The Kingdom that demonstrates continuity and single purpose between the Old Testament and the New. Gleaned much from its closing chapters.
CLASSIC!

John Lipton says

Clear statement and explanation of the unifying theme of the entire Bible. Biblical theology is greatly simplified and unified as Bright traces the concept from Genesis to Revelation.

Eric says

This is a very densely written treatise on the title's subject. I think it really does cover "The Biblical Concept" part of the subject. I am less sure that the part, "... Its Meaning for the Church" is as well done. The Kingdom of God would seem to entail all of His creation, properly understood. Humankind will always want to know more, I suppose. This book, accompanying a good Bible, will further anyone's understanding of the divine realm as described in the sacred texts. What it seems not to do is help nurture the seed that might grow in the heart of the believer. Overall I would term Bright an excellent scholar, but lousy storyteller. It probably needs better be owned in its searchable PDF form for the wealth of biblical knowledge contained therein. It is not the material of a bedtime page turner.

Kevin says

John Bright gives a compelling explanation of the Kingdom of God. Through a comprehensive biblical theology he explains the role of both Israel and the Church in that kingdom. I thought his work in the Old Testament was excellent, while his work in the New Testament was good but not as thorough as his treatment of the Old. He deals more with the problems of the church not truly being the church in the end than with New Testament texts.

All in all, this is an excellent read and a great look at a Biblical theology of the Kingdom of God. I would recommend this to all Christians for a good understanding of this topic.

Stinger says

Dallas Willard has this book among the top five that most impacted his spiritual formation. Given that Willard's concept of the kingdom of God is original to me yet at home in the Bible, I sought this book to discover what lay at the root of his understanding of the kingdom. What I found was not what I expected. The author tells the story of the Bible in historical terms drawing from modern archeology, all the while tying it into the theme of God's people and His kingdom. It's helpful, especially as the author makes application to today's (well, 1950's American, but close enough) church and culture. My favorite quote of Bright's is "the kingdom of God comes only for those who will be His people and obey Him. It can have no other citizens. Truly, the gate is narrow (Matt. 7:14)." This is powerful, like fresh water to my thirsty soul, and both my head and heart know it is so. It is Biblical. It is the dominion of God, in which Jesus Christ rules, and it is available to anyone, including me, in this very moment.

Steve Bender says

Impressive scholarship. It really helped me to follow the changing of the idea of the Kingdom of God through the Old Testament into the New Testament.

Al Soto says

I read this Book for my Mission and Culture in Theological Perspective class at Vanguard University! What an amazing book that develops the whole idea of the Progressive Revelation of Scripture on the basis of "The Mission of God." John Bright has such a command of the Old Testament concept of the "Kingdom." and the whole notion of a people of God, called to live under the rule of God, begins in the Old Testament with the idea of the Kingdom of God. Before you read any of George Eldon Ladd's works on the "Kingdom of God" allow yourself to reflectively read through the pages of the "Suffering Servant." It will impact your theological contemplation in ways that you will have a deepened awareness of what Jesus Christ came to embody as well as what we were created to be as the Church. I highly recommend this book.

David Rickards says

I read this book because it made Dallas Willard's list of Top 5 books. It's a historical survey of the concept of the kingdom of God ... from the Old Testament to the New. While it's dated (written in the 50s), the applications are still relevant to today's church. I learned much!

Dan says

Sometimes, you get to read a book that you feel like you've been looking for your whole life. About 10 years ago, reading the Divine Conspiracy (Dallas Willard) was that book for me. It introduced me to a line of thinking ("The kingdom is at hand") that had not previously struck me as being so prominent in the Bible.

Ever since, I have seen that theme more and more throughout the pages of the prophets and the psalms, the patriarchs and the judges, the gospels and the epistles. And yet, I have heard it preached so rarely, that I wondered if my understanding was simply too juvenile for the supremacy of the individual salvation arc. Was the "kingdom of God" concept of less import than the idea that we are saved by Christ's death?

This book, the second one which felt, from page one, like I had been looking for it my whole life, helped me address that nagging question.

I have often thought that our western mode of thinking leads us to lift up the idea of individual salvation above all other concepts. A country in which individual rights are the prime value is going to tend to lean in the direction of theology that reflects that individualistic bent.

And while the "kingdom of God" as a primary emphasis does not diminish the value of Christ's sacrifice—in fact, it hinges on that very same sacrificial act—it does diminish the idea that Christ's main goal was perhaps not my salvation (the individualistic theology). Not that He does not want me with Him, but that His wanting me has less to do with my value to Him and more to do with God's Kingdom, a kingdom for which the people of God have always truly longed, since the first covenant, where He called His children to be His children, and He promised He would be their God.

In beautiful, haunting, moving, and compelling prose, John Bright, constrained only by the occasional anachronistic reference to Marxist Russia, presents a timeless argument that His Story is not about saving me, but about building His Kingdom. This is how my story becomes worth anything, to submit this life, as trivial, frail, and sinful as it is, to the lordship of His Kingdom, the one that is at hand, that is already and not yet, that is forever and ever.

And one more thing. Please read this book.

Wendy says

Reading this one by an Old Testament professor for a course I'm doing through my church. Not light reading, but really well written.

Eli says

John Bright's writing style is interesting and animated, which makes this book an easy page turner. Most of the book is an excellent analysis of Israel's history and the progress of Israel's understanding of the kingdom of God. I found this very helpful and well thought through. For this alone it is well worth the read.

However, the book disappoints in the last few chapters when Bright begins discussing the kingdom of God in New Testament. It is not that I don't agree with him in his conclusion that the kingdom of God is "already" and "not yet": his discussion of the tension between the kingdom already come and the kingdom still coming is undoubtedly excellent. But it is that Bright wholly sidesteps the issue of the land of Israel, not even mentioning it, as if it was a non-issue. This is remarkable because the entire Old Testament is building up this theme, only for Bright it falls flat in the New Testament. This is a colossal oversight (or better, error) made by many Christian scholars. We fail to see the significance of the land of Israel, as well as the kingly motif of the son of David, even though the land and the coming king is writ large all over the Scriptures!

In the latter part of the book Bright also repeatedly uses the unBiblical and almost blasphemous (though certainly unintentional) phrase "new Israel", even though the Bible never once uses this phrase and never conceives the Church of Christ as the "new Israel". In fact Bright contradicts himself, for in the course of the book he explains how the Church saw itself as the righteous remnant WITHIN Israel (a point well made). Here was an unfortunate and sloppy oversight.

The problems with Bright's book are similar to the problems with Graeme Goldsworthy's book "Gospel and Kingdom", written on the same subject. Both authors do a masterful job of analyzing the Old Testament and tracing the concept of the kingdom of God in Israel's thinking. Their books are pure gold on this point. But then when they both get to the New Testament everything changes and they absolutely fail to connect the dynamic theme, which they had so wonderfully been following in the Old Testament, with the New Testament. Everything falls flat; concepts are redefined; and we are left with an entirely different conception in the New Testament than what we were getting so excited about in the Old Testament. In my opinion this is due to a sloppy Christian systematic way of thinking that gets forced upon the New Testament. This way of thinking doesn't know how to connect with Israel's historical hope. The result is a very Gentilish and non-Biblical idea of the kingdom which is foreign to the Biblical authors themselves. What amazes me most of all is how Christian scholars can make this jarring maneuver without hardly noticing nor even making mention of the land of Israel and the son of David, those enormous Old Testament themes they discard.

Nonetheless the book is full of priceless gems and insights and is greatly worth reading. I simply hope to help future readings of this book (and other books on the same subject) to notice the glaring omissions made by many Christian scholars, and to take special care in seeing the continuity between both Testaments. The lack that exists in Christian scholarship on this point needs serious remedy.

Michael Walker says

Dr. Bright, a disciple of Wm. Foxwell Albright, was professor of Hebrew and the Interpretation of the Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA.

D.j. Lang says

The author states that he wants to make this book available to all readers, but it is still quite academic. I did appreciate the extra notes as I looked at a portion of them. I learned a lot. It wasn't quite what I was hoping for; yet, I thought it was a worthwhile read (and it was an assigned book for me :D)
