

## **Books in Review**

### ***The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church***

by John Bright

This book, written in 1953 by John Bright, longtime Professor of Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, is an excellent presentation of the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God and its meaning for the Church today. The book focuses especially on the Old Testament roots of the concept and then works its way through to the coming of Christ and the rest of the New Testament records. It is highly recommended for anyone who wants to grasp the biblical perspective of the Kingdom of God and its relationship to the NT Church.

The book is best explained in its own words as presented primarily in its Preface:

This book, as its title indicates, is concerned with an idea of central importance in the theology of the Bible. It seeks to trace for the benefit of the general Bible reader the history of that idea and to suggest its contemporary relevance. By this means, it is hoped, a contribution may be made to the understanding of the Scriptures. For the concept of the Kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, the total message of the Bible. Not only does it loom large in the teachings of Jesus; it is to be found, in one form or another, through the length and breadth of the Bible - at least if we may view it through the eyes of the New Testament faith - from Abraham, who set out to seek "the city ... whose builder and maker is God" (Rev. 21:2). 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 [p. 7].

It is submitted in the belief that while the complexity of the Bible is by no means to be minimized, there nevertheless runs through it a unifying theme which is not artificially imposed. It is a theme of redemption, of salvation; and it is

caught up particularly in those concepts which revolve about the idea of a people of God, called to live under his rule, and the concomitant hope of the coming Kingdom of God. This is a note which is present in Israel's faith from the earliest times onward, and which is to be found, in one way or another, in virtually every part of the Old Testament. It also unbreakably links Old Testament to New. For both have to do with the Kingdom of God, and the same God speaks in both [pp. 10-11].

This, then is the good news which the New Testament with unanimous voice proclaims: that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, fulfillment of all the hope of Israel, who has come to set up the Kingdom of God among men. Variegated as the message of the New Testament became, especially as it adapted itself to Gentiles who knew nothing of the hope of Israel, to make that assertion remained at the very heart of the church's gospel.

That assertion is of especial interest to us, because in it the unity of all Scripture is plainly affirmed; in it New Testament is linked unbreakably with the Old, and all biblical theology is made to hang together. For in affirming that Jesus is Messiah, the New Testament affirmed that all the Old Testament faith had longed for and pointed to has been fulfilled in him [pp. 190-191].

In the light of what has been said it becomes clear that the Kingdom of God in the New Testament must be understood in a two-fold aspect: it has come and even now is in the world; it is also yet to come. In the tension between the two the Church must live, and must always live, as the "eschatological community" [p.236].

The New Testament view of the Church is rather plain, incredibly strange as this sounds to our ears. The Church is ... the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), a remnant elected by grace (Rom. 11:5), ... "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... God's people" (I Peter 2:9-10), and much more to the same effect. In short, she is God's holy community, the true Remnant, the people of the New Covenant, and the successor to the calling and destiny of Israel ... In that sense the Church is a peculiar people, for she is the successor of Israel as the chosen servant of God's purposes in history. As such, and as such alone, she is heir to the promises of the coming Kingdom.

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