

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: "The Kingdom of God"



Message: "The Kingdom of God, Israel, and the Church"

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Dr. Mary Craig

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Today we will need a spirit of graciousness because there's nothing like prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled to rile up Christians. Whenever disagreement hinders fellowship, we need to stop and remember what we hold in common, our common union in Christ and salvation in Christ who calls us to trust Him. If it hasn't happened yet, let's focus on preserving the unity of our Christ-centered faith.

The Controversy: The Kingdom of God, Israel, and the Church

According to Romans 10, Israel had refused to heed the Word of God. God offered salvation, but these offers were rejected.

John 1:11-13. **He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**

God took the Gospel to the Gentiles. Did God reject His people? No, says Paul, who was not rejected. Acts 9; Romans 11:1-10; 2 Corinthians 11:22. This furthers the concept of "the remnant," which runs through Scripture. Not all who are in Israel are truly of Israel. The true Jew, or Israelite, is the one believing, as did Abraham (Romans 4).

"Paul was an example of this. Paul had been persecuting the church. The last thing Paul was seeking was salvation in Jesus Christ. Yet, God had seen fit to invade Paul's life and call him to Himself." <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/question-israel/>

Paul in Romans 11 goes on to say that there will be a future conversion of the Jews.

"Many Christians believe that the promises to Israel are completely fulfilled in the New Testament church. This position, held by many Reformed scholars, believes that Romans 11 is not speaking of any special event to take place in the future concerning the Jews as a people, but more generally speaks of individual Jews who come into the kingdom of God during the gospel age.

Others, also including many Reformed scholars, think differently. They hold that Romans 11 predicts a future conversion of Jews. A few see that future conversion as happening before the events of A.D. 70 (but future to Paul), but most see it as not yet fulfilled. The great future conversion of Israel may be something that happens just before the Lord's return, or it may be the last link in the chain of events ushering in a time of prosperity before the Lord's return." Ibid.

There is a unity to the covenant of grace. The new covenant expands the old covenant; it extends to the entire world. The covenants with Abraham, David, and the new covenant in Christ's blood unfold into a redemptive history reaching from Genesis to Revelation, finding fruition in

Christ. There will be a consummation of the covenant of grace. We do well to remember that Jesus maintains and fulfills all of the covenants unilaterally made by the Living God. Old and New are held together by Jesus. God is the faithful God who keeps covenant as the one who calls, and He “does it.” God alone saves.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. *1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24*

“Covenant Theology ...sees the OT as the promise of Christ and the NT as the fulfillment in Christ. Some have accused Covenant Theology as teaching what is called “[Replacement Theology](#)” (i.e., the Church replaces Israel). This couldn’t be further from the truth. Unlike Dispensationalism, Covenant Theology does not see a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. Israel constituted the people of God in the OT, and the Church (which is made up of Jew and Gentile) constitutes the people of God in the NT; both just make up one people of God ([Ephesians 2:11-20](#)). **The Church doesn’t replace Israel** ([Galatians 6:16](#)); a new creation is what counts. All people who exercise the same faith as Abraham are part of the covenant people of God ([Galatians 3:25-29](#)).” <https://www.gotquestions.org/covenant-theology.html>

And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. Gal. 6:16 ESV

When it comes to the KOG and its relationship to Israel and the Church, we have difficulty because the relationship is not set forth in Scripture explicitly. So we have many different interpretations. Here I want to summarize the viewpoint of George Eldon Ladd in his book, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, pages 107ff.

The KOG is the redemptive work of God active in history for the defeat of His enemies and the means by which God brings to people the blessings of the divine reign.

Jesus definitely offered the KOG to Israel. Mt. 10:6; Mt. 15:24; Mt. 8:12. Jesus spoke of the Jews as the “sons of the Kingdom” even though they were rejecting the Messiah and the KOG. They were sons of the Kingdom because it was Israel whom God had chosen and to whom He had promised the blessings of the Kingdom. The Kingdom was theirs by right of election, history, and heritage. Jesus offered to them what had been promised to them. When Israel rejected the Kingdom, the blessings which should have been theirs were given to those who would accept them.

Matthew 11. The age of the law and the prophets ended with John the Baptist. Since then the Kingdom of heaven has been at work among people. Mt. 11:12, 13. The KOG is God’s reign redemptively at work among men; and this is the meaning of Mt. 11:12. However, that generation of Israel would not respond to the work of God’s Kingdom. They were obstinate children playing a game of imitation. They refused to play either wedding or funeral (Mt. 11:16, 17); they refused John’s challenge to repent. They declined the offer of Jesus as to the power and the life of the Kingdom.

So only judgment would be in store for that generation (Mt 11:20). Chorazin and Bethsaida get “woe” because mighty works had been performed in their cities and Israel did not respond. So now the invitation goes out on an individual basis. (Mt. 11:28, 29).

In the OT God dealt with Israel as a family and a nation. He gave them both earthly and religious/spiritual blessings. Circumcision of males brought them within the terms and blessings

of the covenant (Genesis 17:22-27). The Old Covenant dealt with Israel as a nation primarily. Gentiles could share the spiritual blessings of the Old Covenant only by becoming a part of the nation. OT – Israel, nation, Levite priesthood, animal sacrifices.

The offer of the KOG was not the offer of a political kingdom nor did it involve national and material blessings. Jesus refused an earthly crown (John 6:15). He offered spiritual bread (John 6:52-57). Jesus addressed Himself to the individual; and the terms of the new relationship were exclusively those of personal decision and faith. National descent from Abraham did not qualify someone for the blessings of the coming KOG. (Mt. 3:7-10). Someone in the Old Covenant had to personally repent and submit to a baptism of repentance in anticipation of the Messiah to come. (Mt. 10:35, 36)

The family unit is no longer the basis of relationship between God and man. It is personal faith on the basis of election. The Jews rejected and refused this new relationship, but not all.

Mt. 16 relates Jesus' purpose in the formation of a new people of God, the called out ones, or church. Jesus said nothing about His redemptive purpose until the disciples had realized that He was indeed the Messiah. The Messiah must be confessed first, for it is the mission of the Messiah to bring the KOG to people.

The popular expectation of the coming of the KOG meant the end of the Age and the manifestation of God's rule in power and glory when all evil would be purged from the earth. The Kingdom, however, came in a new and unexpected form. The old age goes on while the KOG invades the realm of Satan to deliver people from his rule. It is an already, not yet thing.

Messiah was supposed to be either a conquering Davidic king before whom the enemies of God and of God's people could not stand—or a heavenly supernatural being who would come to earth with power and great glory to destroy the wicked and bring the KOG in power (Daniel 7).

Jesus came as the Messiah, as a man among men, as the Infinite God-Man and Mediator, in humility and weakness, performing miracles. The people would experience a miracle and want to force Jesus' hand to make Him king (John 6:15). But Jesus did not bring the evil Age to its end and inaugurate The Age to Come. Rather He brought the powers of the future Age to Come in the midst of the present evil Age. His mission involved His death. His would be the suffering of love. (Isaiah 53) The people wanted a conquering King or heavenly Son of Man, not some Suffering Servant who offers Himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

It was at Caesarea Philippi that the disciples came to a basic understanding that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Mt. 16:16). It came only through divine revelation.

Then Jesus revealed His purpose further. It would not be some national restoration of Israel, but the creation of a new people. The Lord would build His Church, *ekklesia*. This Greek word, *ekklesia*, is the word most commonly used in the Greek OT to refer to Israel as the people of God.

The key of knowledge should open the door of the KOG and had been entrusted to the leaders of the Jewish people. This key was the correct understanding and interpretation of the OT. The Jews should have recognized in Jesus' person and ministry the presence of the KOG and the fulfillment of OT promises and prophecies. (Romans 3:2) But the scribes had taken away the key of knowledge; they interpreted the Scriptures so as to point away from Christ rather than to Him. They refused what Jesus brought and they hindered others who wanted to enter.

The key of knowledge which had been entrusted to Israel is now entrusted to the apostles and to the Church. Mt. 21:33-43.

Israel had been the channel and the children of Israel were indeed the sons of the Kingdom. Gentiles entered the blessings only by entering into relationship with Israel. Israel rejected, but not all. The new creation in Christ is a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). It is people of faith who are the sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:7). Christ has made those who constitute His Church to be priests to His God and Father (Rev. 1:6). It is not a nation after the flesh, but a holy nation on the basis of personal saving faith in Jesus, God come in the flesh.

As the divine redemptive rule of God, the KOG has come among people to defeat Satan and to deliver from Satan's domination. It is a present realm in which these blessings are enjoyed as people may now enter into the KOG. The people of God are those who have received the good news of redemption and have been delivered from the dominion of darkness (2 Cor. 4:4) and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13). The KOG is the Kingdom of Christ. It manifests through the person of Christ and it is Christ who reigns until He has put all His enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25). The last enemy is death.

Jesus sent out His disciples through the villages of Israel to proclaim that the KOG had come near (Luke 10:9). They performed the signs of the kingdom; healing the sick and casting out demons, delivering people from satanic powers. Any city rejecting them rejected the KOG and brought upon themselves judgment.

The redeemed preach and proclaim the KOG and people individually can receive it or reject it. The Church Invisible is composed of all of those who by one Spirit have been baptized into one body. **There is but one people of God**, one olive tree (Romans 11). In the OT the branches of the tree were Israel. Because of unbelief, some of the natural branches were broken off and no longer belong to the tree (11:16). Not all were broken off because there is a remnant, chosen by grace. Some Jews accepted the Messiah and the gospel. They came into the church, the company of called-out ones, because they believed in Jesus Christ.

Other branches were taken from a wild olive and contrary to nature were grafted into the olive tree. (Romans 11:17, 24; Mt. 21:43). These Gentiles were grafted in because of their faith. In the OT the people of God consisted of the children of Israel. Gentiles entered only by sharing the terms of God's covenant with Israel. In the NT the natural branches, Israel, have been largely broken off the tree because of unbelief, and wild branches from the Gentiles have been grafted in. But there is but one tree, one people of God, and there is a unity to the covenant of grace.

The story is not over. If the natural branches do not persist in their unbelief, they will be grafted in and God has the power to graft them in again. All Israel will be saved (Romans 11:23, 24f). Israel is yet to believe and be grafted again into the olive tree. It is a mystery. The hardening of Israel is only partial and temporary until the full number of Gentiles has come in. When God's purpose with the wild branches is complete, He will turn again to the natural branches. The veil will be taken away from their eyes (2 Cor. 3:16).

We as the elect are to press the struggle against satanic evil in the world. We are both light and salt. We must shine and preserve. We must employ the keys of the kingdom to open to both Jew and Gentile the door into eternal life which is the gift of God's Kingdom. We must press the battle against the powers of darkness wherever we find them until the day dawns and the light of the knowledge of God fills the earth.

Our great enemy is death. Christ has nullified the power of death and the power of Satan. Satan's power and domination has been broken. God's Kingdom delivers people from enslavement to Satan. It brings them out of darkness into the saving and healing light of the Gospel. Sin also has been defeated; its power is broken. The work of Christ is both past and future. Satan, death, and sin have been destroyed, abolished. Believe it. Tell others. When the Church has accomplished its mission, Jesus will return. (George Eldon Ladd. *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, pages 107ff)

Theologian R. C. Sproul weighs in:

“As Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives, ready to depart, His disciples asked Him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ([Acts 1:6](#)). They had been waiting for Jesus to make His move, to drive out the Romans and establish the kingdom, but Jesus replied, “**It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth**” (vv. 7–8).

In answer to their question about the kingdom, Jesus gave the fundamental mission of the church. Men would be blind to His kingship, so His disciples were given the task of making it visible. The fundamental task of the church is to bear witness to the kingdom of God. Our King reigns now, so for us to put the kingdom of God entirely in the future is to miss one of the most significant points of the New Testament. Our King has come and has inaugurated the Kingdom of God. The future aspect of the Kingdom is its final consummation.” (Sproul, R. C. *Everyone's a Theologian*) <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/kingdom-god-strictly-future/>

Bibliography: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/question-israel/>
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Mary Craig, D. Min.

To him who loves us and has freed [loosed] us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:5b, 6 ESV



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