

Lifebyte 51

Kingdom Living (Part 1)

The Older Testament Foundations To The Kingdom of God

Jesus Proclaims A Kingdom



*For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?
Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)*



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Introduction

In Lifebytes 47 thru 50 we discussed issues that strengthen or hinder a vibrant Covenant marriage which reflects the love of Jesus. We stressed that the indwelling presence of the **Spirit of Jesus** develops and amplifies His love *in you*—a Spirit-to-spirit empowerment.

Beginning with this Lifebyte and the next few, we want to share with you how both the **Hebraic Restoration** and the **Older Testament** support what our Lord Jesus came to inaugurate—the **Kingdom of God** on earth.

You may wonder why you haven't heard much about the Kingdom, particularly since Jesus spends so much time describing what the Kingdom is like. In fact, the "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God" are specifically mentioned *98 times* in the Newer Testament!

You've probably been taught all your life about "church", and then equated that concept with God's Kingdom. But as you'll come to realize, the Kingdom and the organizational Church have nothing in common!

The Kingdom of God begins with the rule of the Spirit of Jesus in your spirit. Jesus makes clear the internalized nature of His Kingdom within His followers: "*I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you*" (John 14:20). The connectedness of your spirit with the indwelling Spirit of Jesus enables you to live in Covenant unity with our Father (see John 17:11,21,22).

The organized church system with its 23,000 differing denomination/sect expressions is based on external religious forms and practices. The systems will go on regardless of the spiritual state of those who participate. That's because services and rituals appeal to men's *soul-ishness*, that is, to their sin nature-con-

trolled mind, will and emotions. Contemporary westerners tend toward a candy-store mentality in their religious practices: they look for one that suits their particular tastes.

The underlying theme of these next few Lifebytes is this:

**It's impossible to serve both the Kingdom of God and religion.
Religion will always be a hindrance to Kingdom living.**

This Lifebyte focuses on elements of God's Kingdom that emanate from the *Hebrew Scriptures*. Understanding the foundational truths of the Older Testament that Jesus taught from and lived by helps us today to grasp the framework on which He was building. That way we won't make unscriptural assumptions.

The Kingdom Is NOT Organized Religion!

The immanent approach of the "Kingdom of Heaven" was a long-anticipated hope of Israel. Long down-trodden by many nations, especially the Roman war machine, the first-century Jews were hungry for the *prophesied rule of God* to be in their midst. The preparatory message was pointed and specific:

John the Baptizer: "**Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near**" (Matthew 3:2)

Jesus: "**Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near**" (Matthew 4:17).

Among faithful Jews, the *name of God* was too holy to be repeated. Therefore alternate designators were often used instead. The Kingdom of **Heaven** was well understood to refer to the Almighty, especially by Matthew. His perspective is

decidedly oriented toward Jews, as his Gospel account overflows with apperceived* Hebrew Scriptures.

[***Apperception:** interpreting new information in terms of previous facts you already know beyond doubt to be true. In other words, you evaluate a newer teaching or practice according to *older, proven truths*. Jesus relied on apperception in His teachings by often quoting the Older Testament and then applying that truth to a situation He was specifically addressing.]

All throughout the four Gospels Jesus expands our understanding of His *kingdom*. In fact, only twice does He speak of “church” in the Gospel accounts (Matthew 16:18 and 18:17) — the collective body of the called-out that HE will build! In both instances Jesus is telling His followers that He’s giving them halakhic authority to apply the Hebrew Scriptures to their own lives. No longer would they have to depend on religious leaders to prescribe their faith practices.

So why, in the first few hundred years following Christ’s resurrection, is there a change of emphasis from “Kingdom” to “church”? Blame it on the influence of Greek philosophy and Roman organization on Christendom in the second and third centuries.

Because of this combined pagan influence, most contemporary Christians have been taught to focus on the institution that’s commonly called “church”. When Emperor Constantine approved Christianity as a religion in AD 313, it became advantageous to attend religious services, to “go to church”. If you were born in any area covered by the Roman Empire, you were considered “Christian” and expected to be under the ecclesiastical steeple—the authorized “church” building.

This idea hasn’t faded over the cen-

turies! How many infants are automatically baptized as some sort of “heavenly identification ritual” in the hope that God will consider them “Christian”? These children are then expected to grow up as members of an institutional organization called “church”.

But this systematic approach to what our Lord intended to be an *internalized relationship* between Himself and His people has hampered understanding of the Kingdom of God. The practice of “going to church” is totally disconnected from the rest of people’s daily lives. They become inoculated against living in day-to-day loving obedience to the internalized Lordship of King Jesus. As a result, they fail to fulfill His Kingdom purposes.

The Second Exodus

As Barna Research has noted, millions upon millions are leaving the institutionalized “church” today. Their spirit is hungry and thirsting for intimacy with their God and with an extended spiritual family that has been so poorly imitated by schedule-dominated, man-centered religion.

Many of these who have exited organized religion are learning to appreciate an essential issue of the Kingdom: to walk daily in repentance—*turning away from* that which is in error according to God’s way, and *turning to God* to walk in union with the Spirit of Jesus. That kind of spiritual intimacy calls for *turning away* from pagan-based religious systems which appease man’s sinful lifestyle and self-satisfaction, and *turning to* the Kingdom which Jesus has been building by His Spirit.

We want to help you rethink what Jesus meant by the “Kingdom of God” whose beloved subjects are the *ekklesia* — the “called-out ones” of the King. These

are His chosen, born from above to take their place in His Kingdom in loving and obedient service to Him.

As Greek philosophical principles and Roman organizational patterns were appropriated as the basis for organized religion, the living organism of *ekklesia* became translated as “church institution”, taking on the trappings similar to those of the heathen religions of their day.

You can see on the Timeline above that our Father began to openly restore the Hebraic foundations in 1967. The prophetic words of Jesus to return the “city of the Great King” (Psalms 48:2, apperceived in Matthew 5:35) to the Jewish people were fulfilled: “*Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*” (Luke 21:24). In 1967 the Jews wrested control of the city from Gentiles for the first time in over 2000 years.

Out of His perfect timing and loving grace our Father is restoring the Hebraic foundations that were so powerfully embraced by the earliest followers of Jesus. The Hebraic foundations help us today to understand the **Kingdom** that Jesus came to establish, and to do our part as His beloved kingdom people.

The Kingdom Of God

Older Testament Foundations

Within the Hebrew Scriptures we discover the nature of God’s relationship with those He chooses as His own to fulfill His purposes through them. Consider the example of the Israelites. The blessings that accompanied their loving obedience as well as the painful chastisement that ensued from their disobedience are intended as a warning for us, “upon whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Since our topic at hand concerns the *Kingdom* of God, remember that every kingdom is ruled by a *king*. It has often been said:

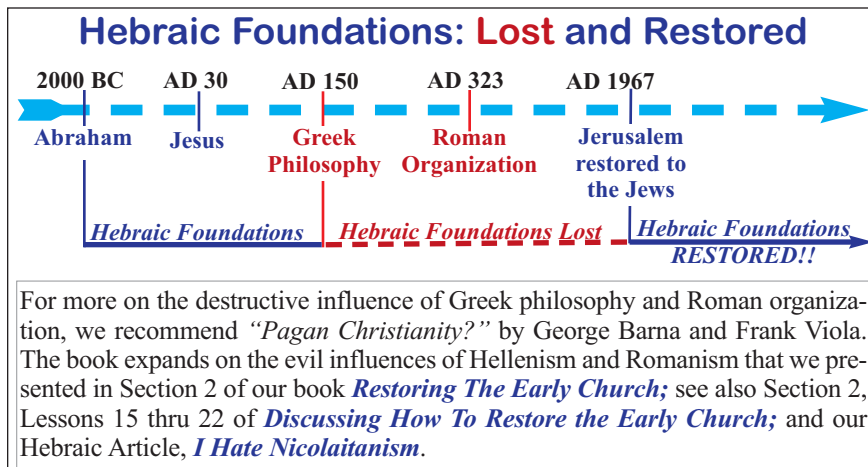
The Older Testament brings forth truth in the physical arena so that we in the Spirit can recognize the same principles at work in the spiritual realm.

The children of Israel had been lovingly chosen by God as His *treasured possession*—not because they were numerous or deserving but because it *pleased God* to do this. God was their sovereign Ruler,



the One Who instituted His ways on earth through His people. The priesthood would establish His holiness as His people walked in His ways, and a line of kings would ultimately produce the King on earth, Messiah.

Ancient Israel entered their lengthy season of human mon-



archs when they voiced their yearning to *be like other nations*, with a human king they could follow (1 Samuel 8:20). Beginning with Saul there ensued generations of monarchs, some godly and others wickedly compromised with demonic deities.

How grievous to our heavenly Father was the distrust of His people toward His Kingship! Their appeal for a human king also distressed the faithful prophet Samuel, but not nearly as much as it pierced the heart of God: *“They have not rejected you, Samuel, but they have rejected ME, that I should not reign over them as their King”* (see 1 Samuel 8:7).

This is the same heart cry of God today. Until you truly understand the *Kingdom*, you can’t appreciate how far from the King that modern Christendom has departed.

While the substitute of man’s progeny as ruler was a slap to God as King over His people, God chose to honor one specific man for his heart toward His Lord: David. King David’s *internalized relationship* with God is demonstrated in his repentance and ongoing love for Him.

The children of Israel had no problem with the concept of a king—they just wanted to exchange the rule of God for a government like that of the heathen peoples around them.

The reality in the Older Testament of God’s people being a *Kingdom* was readily understood when John the Baptist preached that the Kingdom of God was near at hand. Surely now would be the time of fulfillment of that which prophets and kings alike had longed to see and hear in their midst! (See Luke 10:23,24.)

Whom did our Hebraic ancestors who trusted in the God of their fathers

recognize as the **ultimate King** of all? Listen to the joyful declarations of psalmists and prophets alike:

•“*How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!*” (Psalms 47:2).

•“*Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises*” (Psalm 47:6).

•“*For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods*” (Psalms 95:3).

•“*For I am a great King,*” says the LORD of hosts, “*and My name is to be feared among the nations*” (Malachi 1:14).

•“*I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever*” (Psalms 145:1).

•“*I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, your King*” (Isaiah 43:15).

•“*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey*” (Zechariah 9:9, apperceived in Matthew 21:5).

•“*And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles*” (Zechariah 14:16).

That this long-awaited King would rule from **Jerusalem**, the Holy City, Mount Zion, had been repeatedly foretold. That was why expectation was high as the crowds so eagerly welcomed Jesus, “*lowly and riding on a donkey.*” Passover was approaching; their hearts throbbed with



hope that the King was finally coming to ascend His throne in the City of the Great King (see Matthew 5:35)!

The prophesied, all-powerful King would rule and reign from Jerusalem. Rule *what?* The Kingdom of God, where *His will* would be done on earth as it is in heaven (see Matthew 6:10). However, the people were deeply divided between those who sought an earthly king to overcome the hated Roman occupation, and those who awaited the reign of the King of Kings on earth.

Only the longed-for Messiah could fulfill the prophetic promises of unbroken peace and the wealth of the nations streaming into Jerusalem. Only Messiah, the anointed Priest and King, could come with chariots of fire and execute judgment on His enemies (Isaiah 66:15,16) and make them His footstool (Psalms 110:1, apperceived in Hebrews 1:13).

Isaiah had prophesied that the government would be on the shoulders of Messiah to rule according to the line of David's kingdom (Isaiah 9:6,7). The people were primed to make Jesus King by force so that the Kingdom they'd longed for would be fulfilled (John 6:15).

Of course, they thought that *their* enemies were *His* enemies, and that He would cast down the Romans and anyone else who didn't submit to His rule. Even James and John were hopeful that this was the case, and wanted to serve as "prime ministers" on His left and right!

They, the "*sons of thunder*", wanted to call down lightning to destroy their perceived Samaritan enemies. They were aware of Isaiah's prophecy that the blood of the trampled nations would "*spatter His garments out of His anger*" (Isaiah 63:3).

God had vowed to come and execute judgment against those who scattered His

people and divided up His land (Joel 3:2). The *reality of Judgment* before the holy Judge, whether for Jew or Gentile, was never an issue. Jesus is recorded at least eighteen times bringing up the matter! Surely there was eagerness for the *enemy* to be judged, even if the log of their own disobedience against God would bring similar wrath upon Jews as well.

The Apostle Paul continued with the Kingdom theme, persuading unbelievers about Jesus from both the Law and the Prophets (Acts 28:23,31). Yet what indicators from the *Hebrew Scriptures* would validate JESUS as the King of Israel?

The Miraculous: A Kingdom Signpost

God had shown Himself to be the mighty Redeemer of Israel as miracle after miracle proved both His faithfulness and His deliverance power. The Exodus accounts were specific in their proof that this awesome God had rescued them in fulfillment of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The catastrophic plagues upon the Egyptians had wrought judgment upon their false gods (Numbers 33:4). The Red Sea had parted to grant them safe passage and swiftly closed again to annihilate Pharaoh's pursuing army.



God's loving care poured down as manna from the heavens and water from the rock. By His power even their clothing and shoes withstood their wilderness years (Deuteronomy 29:5). So when Jesus changed the water into wine and multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed the hungry, He was mirroring the *tangible provision* that had been met by the Sovereign King of Israel.



Anticipation was kindled that Messiah King would rule—especially since Jesus referred so often to the *Kingdom*! And the healing miracles that had been prophesied by Isaiah as signs of Messiah’s coming (Isaiah 35:15; 61:1) were proclaimed by Jesus as work of the Spirit of the Lord God through Him (Luke 4:18). Surely the Kingdom was at hand!

The Eternal Nature of the Coming Kingdom

Daniel had reported that God would establish an indestructible KINGDOM that would crush other kingdoms (Daniel 7:14). In this forthcoming KINGDOM, all other dominions and rulers will serve and obey the King (7:27). The holy ones of God who have been *called out for Him* will receive this KINGDOM and possess it forever (7:18).

Little wonder that His hearers had no need for Jesus to define *Kingdom* when He so often (100 times in Matthew, Mark and Luke) discussed what the Kingdom is like. The people were *hungry* for the Kingdom to come, and for the *King to reign* as sole head over His people (1 Timothy 6:15).

Surely, from the disciples’ perspective, the “*all nations and languages and peoples*” who would bow before the King would overpower the arrogant Roman war machine. However, God’s ways are according to His *eternal* plans, not man’s *now* point of view.

The ultimate goal of the Kingdom is a restored world free from sin and death, governed by the eternal King. This will be the future when Jesus takes up His throne. Yet, because of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus, *Kingdom power* is at work

now through His indwelled followers (Luke 17:21). In order to be part of the *future* Kingdom, you must trust Him and do your part as His loving and obedient follower in the *present*.

The Kingdom Message of The Father Heart of God

Israel had been chosen to be the “wife” of God (Jeremiah 31:32) because He loved them and had sworn an oath to the Patriarchs that He would keep His promises to them (Deuteronomy 7:7,8). He’d also promised Israel that He’d never leave or forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6,8).

Israel counted on this vow of His abiding presence with His faithful ones when they cried out to Him (Isaiah 42:16). They trusted that because of *His love* and the eternal nature of *His promise to Abraham*, He’d never cast them off (Psalms 94:14). Jesus, too, promised that He would be with His faithful always (Matthew 28:20). Because HE would be with them in all their need as their unfailing Helper (Hebrews 13:5,6), they’d never need to covet what those of the world had.

If only Israel had clung to the Father Who had shown such love and mercy to them! Yet Israel chose to give in to evil and backsliding, and turned away from their holy awe of God (Jeremiah 2:19). That decision to forsake their God and His command for their obedient trust brought about dire punishment (Jeremiah 12:7).

Numerous Hebrew scriptures portray a tender Father/child relationship. Israel was chosen to be the *firstborn son of God* among all the peoples of the earth (Exodus 4:22). God referred to Himself as their Father, Who bought them and *fathered* them, and called them His *sons and daughters* (Deuteronomy 32:17-19).

How often Jesus introduced His fellow Jews to God as *their Father* (Matthew 5:45). How tender is the assurance to those who walk in loving, obedient trust in Jesus: “*Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” (Luke 12:32).

The Hebrew ancestors of those who sought out Jesus could clearly recognize from His teaching that it aligned with their Scripture. (What surprised them was the authority with which He taught!) His teaching never nullified the written code; rather, Jesus reiterated the necessity of the *heart being right* before God. The *poor in spirit* and those who are *righteous* even to the point of being persecuted for it have hearts that are *Kingdom motivated* (Matthew 5:3,10).

The issue of a right heart was nothing new to His hearers. God had promised Israel a CIRCUMCISED HEART for them and their descendants so that they would LOVE Him with all their heart and soul (Deuteronomy 30:6). That love would be *worked out* in their daily lives as their key to life in Him through obeying His voice and doing that which He commanded (Deuteronomy 30:8).

The Holy Spirit was at work to stir the hearts of those who loved their Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. They were called to respond to their Father’s voice and obey it according to His Word (Deuteronomy 30:10). *Love-grounded, obedient trust* encapsulated Kingdom living in the gracious Fatherhood of God.

The Pharisees and law experts, however, resisted trusting in the loving kindness of God as a Father to them. Fearful that God would be displeased with His people, they served the written code, establishing hedges of further laws around it to protect it from violation.

This was their idea of obedience, which was a slippery path to *self-righteousness* and *legalistic perversion*.

In contrast, Jesus proclaimed GOD as the standard of righteousness, using the appellation of “Father” to emphasize the love relationship and intimacy that God desired with His people as their standard: “*Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48).

The Fatherhood of God in His Kingdom can’t be overstated. God as “Father” is noted 184 times in the gospels in such very earthly, practical ways as Provider (Matthew 6:26) and Rewarder (Matthew 6:18) and Giver of both the Kingdom and the Holy Spirit (Luke 11: 13,32).

Note that “your” Father exudes intimacy with one another as *family members*, since *your* is plural. Jesus separates “His” Father from “their” Father to show that while God is Father to both, it’s on a very different level: the Father/Son relationship identifies Jesus as Deity (John 8:19, Acts 13:33), while their position is as children who are totally dependent on their heavenly Father (Luke 12:30).

Concluding Thoughts

Over the centuries the organized Church has devolved into the external Kingdom for which the earthly-minded Jews were looking. Whenever you look *outside* yourself dependent on spiritual spoon-feeding rather than *inside* to the Spirit of Jesus, you’ll rely on religious forms and expressions. The rule of Jesus within, however, makes *externals* unnecessary.

Jesus Himself as King rules to extend His Kingdom—first in your spirit, then your soul, and ultimately throughout the world. You don’t need *religion* to experience Him. Rather, look to Him in your spirit and in the spirit of your family in Him.