
6

The Age of Sabbath

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Genesis 2:2-3

The Sabbath, so prominent in the Old Testament, is powerful kingdom truth. It derives from God's sovereignty and points toward the final age of rest when God rules without rivals. So Sabbath is closely woven with the other themes we have been noting.

Sabbath goes to the root of Israel's self-identity as a people. It begins not at Mount Sinai but at creation: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gen 2:2-3).

Some translations mask the force of what Genesis 2:2 actually

says. The Revised Standard Version is literally accurate: "On the seventh day God finished his work which he had done." Did God finish the work of creating on the sixth day or on the seventh? The original account says God finished his work on the seventh day. Why? Because God did create something on the seventh day: He created Sabbath. The Sabbath is not a negation—merely the cessation of work—but an affirmation, the creation of rest, peace, *shalom*. On the seventh day God created *shalom*—the crown and goal of all his work.

In God's rhythm, life always looks ahead to Sabbath. Life moves toward the time of peace and rest, of fulfilled meaning. For God's people, every week leads to the Sabbath climax, and all history leads to the *shalom* of the kingdom—the final, perfect Sabbath. This is the drama of the kingdom.

So it is that the Sabbath law, as part of the Mosaic covenant, is to be understood. Israel viewed the Sabbath as the heart of the law.¹ It was a day of rest, to be kept holy.

In Old Testament summaries of the law, more space is given to the Sabbath than to any other of the Ten Commandments. An interesting difference, however, appears in the two accounts of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-21). The Sabbath law is the same in both, but the basis is different. In the Exodus account, Israel is to observe Sabbath because on the seventh day God rested, blessed and set apart that day. But Deuteronomy cites another reason: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (Deut 5:15).

Thus the Sabbath is grounded in both creation and in liberation or redemption. God's people have double reason to rest and remember God's covenant. They are God's people both by creation and by liberation. The same God who created the world, history and Sabbath is the God who recreates, who redeems and liberates. God is acting in the struggles of history, redeeming and preparing a people of his own, leading to the final Sabbath of

the kingdom. The Sabbath becomes a sign of the faithfulness (or a testimony against the unfaithfulness) of God's covenant people. So God says, "You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy. . . . The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested" (Ex 31:13-17).

Abraham Heschel describes the Sabbath as the sanctification of time. The Hebrew faith, he says, "is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time."² Hebrew faith is more interested in time than in space; it hallows history more than geography.³ Heschel notes,

To Israel the unique events of historic time were spiritually more significant than the repetitive processes in the cycle of nature, even though physical sustenance depended on the latter. While the deities of other peoples were associated with places or things, the God of Israel was the God of events: the Redeemer from slavery, the Revealer of the Torah, manifesting Himself in events of history rather than in things or places.⁴

This is not to downplay the world of space and things, but rather to put the material world in perspective. Specifically, the Sabbath puts the created world in the perspective of God's historic kingdom plan: What exists is grounded in God's creation and his plan of redemption. Things have meaning as they are seen in the flow of God's economy. As in a good mystery, the conclusion gives meaning to the flow of details, some seemingly pointless, that precede. The Sabbath is a taste of eternity.

As a kingdom theme, the Sabbath shows that God is the God of time and history. This underscores the historical character of his reign. God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, but not a timeless one. Time does not end in an eternal, timeless realm.

The kingdom is not timelessness, but timefulness—the fullness of time, the everlasting reign of God. The kingdom is dynamic, not static—as dynamic as the God who creates, sustains and liberates.⁵

Given the Sabbath's prominence in the Old Testament, its seemingly minor role in the New Testament may surprise us. Most of the references in the Gospels, in fact, are to charges that Jesus violated the Sabbath by healings or other “profane” activities on the sacred day. Is there any kingdom message here?

Two things immediately stand out when we look at Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath. First, Jesus observed the Sabbath but refused to let Sabbath traditions keep him from doing the work of the kingdom. Second, Jesus said he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17-18). He showed what this means for the Sabbath when he said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mk 2:27-28).

Thus Jesus himself is the fulfillment of the Sabbath. Sabbath finds its meaning in him—his person, work and reign—just as the kingdom centers in him. The fulfillment of the Sabbath in Jesus is symbolized by the church's adoption of the first day of the week (the day of resurrection) as her principal day of worship rather than the seventh day.

This meaning of Sabbath is expanded in Hebrews 4. Sabbath was not fulfilled when Israel entered the Promised Land. “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience” (Heb 4:9-11). The writer uses the Sabbath theme to hold out hope for a more perfect rest and to urge diligence now so we may enter God's rest.

This “rest” has often been taken to mean heaven, as in Baxter's classic *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*. But what is heaven, if not the final establishment of the kingdom of God? Hebrews pictures

Jesus as our pioneer who has gone before us, conquering sin and entering the very presence of God where "he always lives to intercede for" us (Heb 7:25). Jesus is King of Salem (*shalom*), King of Peace (Heb 7:1-2). In him the kingdom has come in power, and through him the kingdom will come in fullness. God's people now experience Sabbath—the peace and rest found in reconciliation with God, and with sisters and brothers in the Christian community. And this very Sabbath experience gives them strength to trust and to struggle for the final kingdom rest which Jesus has assured us is coming. It is this final triumph which is pictured so graphically in the book of Revelation.

Notice that this final rest is not merely the end of conflict. It is restoration, reconciliation, liberation. It is truly the creation of Sabbath! It is God's people, and with them the whole creation, "liberated" from "bondage to decay" (Rom 8:21). Peter stresses this when he speaks of the promised "time . . . for God to restore everything" (Acts 3:21) and of the new heaven and new earth for which we yearn (2 Pet 3:13). The kingdom as God's Sabbath is perfect restoration, God's final *shalom*.

In the New Testament, then, the coming of Jesus is the decisive step toward the fulfillment of Israel's Sabbath. Jesus fulfills the law and inaugurates the kingdom. God's rest has now been internalized in a new way, with the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And it has been universalized through the spread of the good news of the kingdom to all peoples, the whole earth, and the beginning reconciliation which this brings. Yet, even so, "there remains . . . a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (Heb 4:9), for the kingdom has not yet come in its fullness. We must still "make every effort to enter that rest" (Heb 4:11); we must still seek first the kingdom of God.

The Sabbath theme thus expands and reinforces the understanding of God's kingdom revealed by other themes.

The Narrow Gate

I was brought up strictly to observe Sunday as the Sabbath. It was

a special day and I felt it. It was not a day for buying and selling, business or schoolwork, but for worship and rest. Even recreational sports were frowned on. The time was hallowed. (And I found, incidentally, that six days weekly were enough to get schoolwork done, even in graduate school!)

While my ideas of Sabbath have changed some, I appreciate that training, that sense of a special day, which still remains with me. With the invasion of television and growing affluence, many North American Christians have lost all sense of Sabbath and the hallowing of time.

But Sabbath has come to have a deeper sense the more I meditate on the kingdom. There remains a Sabbath rest for God's people, and its name is the kingdom of God. What a significant step toward the kingdom, if all God's people would dedicate the Lord's Day to learning, meditating on and witnessing to the kingdom of God, the Sabbath of the Lord! How powerful for the kingdom and for kingdom living throughout the week, if we would really hallow the Sabbath day as a time for equipping God's people to be the community of the King through worship, witness and community!

Sabbath sensitivity might have several practical implications for the church today:

1. *The church should affirm the rhythm of the seven-day week, and of Sunday as a special day.* I speak here not of a new legalism, but of a new realism. God has made us part of the rhythm of nature, which reflects the truth of his own character (Gen 2:1-2). We ignore this rhythm to our own hurt; to live in harmony with it is health. The weekly Sabbath is a day of rest for body, mind and spirit, and for renewing our vision for the ultimate rest and *shalom* of the kingdom.

Part of our discipling, then, should concern our good stewardship of time, built around the weekly pattern, kingdom priorities and the sense of walking in harmony with God's reconciling work in bringing his kingdom. How will it be possible for us to see clearly what God is bringing in the future if we do not pace

our lives to see and feel what he is doing now?

2. *The church needs a clearer focus on worship as a window on the kingdom.* The whole week takes its meaning from our communal worship of God, just as history takes its meaning from the reality and certainty of final kingdom Sabbath. Living 'a life of worship means learning the life of worship in our times of gathered praise to God. As a discipling priority, this means building our lives around the priority of weekly worship as empowerment for daily witness.

3. *Through the rhythm of its life, the church should foster greater kingdom expectancy.* What, after all, are we living for? Jesus said the kingdom must have top priority (Mt 6:33). Worship should focus not only on who God is and what he has done, but on what he is doing and promises in his kingdom plan. The worshiping, nurturing and witnessing life of the church should all be lived out in expectancy of God's final Sabbath. Sunday worship then becomes the foretaste of the coming kingdom.

In kingdom perspective, it makes sense not to build up treasures on earth, but to invest our time and resources in the work of the kingdom. Time will finally reveal the wisdom of the investment when God brings to fulfillment all his kingdom promises. How foolish it will look, then, to have gained much for ourselves but little for the kingdom!

The Age of Jubilee

Count off seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan.

Leviticus 25:8-10

Most fascinating of all the biblical kingdom themes is the Jubilee.

The Jubilee appears first in Leviticus 25 and later is developed prophetically, especially in Isaiah 58 and 61.¹ It is based on the fact that God as King is owner of the land, and his people are stewards.

The Jubilee is a Sabbath of Sabbaths. It extends the provision of the sabbatical year by requiring all land to be returned to its original occupants. Thus the four main provisions of the Jubilee were (1) the land was to lie fallow; (2) slaves were to be liberated; (3) debts were to be cancelled; and (4) all land acquired during the forty-nine previous years was to be returned.

Note that these provisions are all fundamentally economic and ecological. Despite the various interpretations of the Jubilee, five implications, at least, are clear, and all have kingdom significance: (1) In the Jubilee, spiritual, social, economic, liturgical and historical dimensions are all interwoven. (2) The Jubilee is especially directed toward the interests of the poor, the disadvantaged and the oppressed. (3) The Jubilee is rooted in God's character as seen in creation and redemption (as evidenced, for example, in Gen 2:2-3; Ex 20; Deut 5). (4) The Jubilee concerns the relationship of God's people to God's land and is thus earthly and ecological. (5) The Jubilee combines total dependence on God's sovereignty with human freedom, responsibility, initiative and accountability. Precisely *because* God is sovereign over his people and land, his people must act in harmony with his revealed character.

Isaiah uses the Jubilee theme as a picture of the goal of God's kingdom:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
 because the LORD has anointed me
 to preach good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
 to proclaim freedom for the captives
 and release for the prisoners,
 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
 and the day of vengeance of our God,
 to comfort all who mourn,
 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
 to bestow on them a crown of beauty
 instead of ashes,
 the oil of gladness
 instead of mourning,
 and a garment of praise
 instead of a spirit of despair. (Is 61:1-3)

Here are the nature, character and breadth of the kingdom of God in Jubilee language. And this vision in turn provides the

background for Jesus' own proclamation of the kingdom.

Jesus clearly identified himself with the Jubilee in his Nazareth sermon when, reading from Isaiah 61, he said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," and then added, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:18-21). The "year of the Lord's favor," or "the acceptable year," scholars agree, clearly refers to the proclamation of the Jubilee year.² Jesus' proclamation in Nazareth may actually have occurred during the Jubilee year of A.D. 26-27.³ As Mortimer Arias says, "Jesus came to announce the Kingdom of God and he did it in Jubilee language."⁴

What did Jesus mean by proclaiming Jubilee in Luke 4? It is indisputable that Jesus here refers to the Jubilee; the question is what he intended and what it means for us today. Interpretations vary, ranging from those of Trocmé and Yoder,⁵ who see here a literal Jubilee year announcement, to views which see the "release" Jesus proclaimed as exclusively "spiritual" or eschatological. What is the truth?

As we have seen, the Jubilee is tied closely to themes of justice, the land and care for the oppressed. In the Old Testament the Jubilee is an earthly, this-worldly concern. Even in Isaiah 58 and 61, where the theme looks ahead to God's decisive Jubilee, the meaning is not necessarily "spiritualized." We cannot remove the this-worldly meaning of Jubilee from the Luke 4 passage, therefore, without solid justification. On the other hand, interpretations which see Luke 4 as the proclamation of a literal Jubilee year in Jesus' own time fail to explain adequately the Jews' reaction in Nazareth or to align this proclamation with the rest of Jesus' ministry, where the Jubilee does not seem to be prominent.

The most balanced interpretation of Jesus' Nazareth sermon I have found is given by Lesslie Newbigin in his book *Sign of the Kingdom*. Jesus' Nazareth proclamation, says Newbigin,

is the proclamation of a true king in the messianic tradition. It is the function of a just ruler, a true king, to bring deliverance to the oppressed. This is an application of the Davidic strand in Old Testament teaching about the Kingdom. And the reasons for which Jesus' words were rejected is not (as far as this pericope is concerned) because he was on the side of the poor against the rich. The reasons are twofold. In the first place, he offended against nationalist sentiment (verses 23-27). The suggestion that God's first care might not be Israel but the Gentiles was the first thing that aroused the popular fury against him. In the second place they took offence at his person. "Is not this Joseph's son?" they said. And so the rejection at Nazareth was not an action of "the Establishment"; the story seems to make it quite clear that it was a "people's movement" that tried to destroy him at the outset.⁶

Newbigin notes that the Gospels do indeed "carry forward the Old Testament faith that 'God has a bias in favour of the poor,' " but this must be understood "in the framework of the basic Old Testament conviction that Yahweh is the true king who intervenes to establish the cause of the oppressed against their oppressors." Thus "the cause of stumbling is that [God's] intervention is embodied in the person of this man Jesus, who does not conform to the popular expectations of the Messiah. . . . The cause of stumbling is the Person of Jesus himself."

Jesus does not seem to have been inaugurating a Jubilee year. Rather he was announcing the Jubilee *age*—the very kingdom of God (Mt 4:17). But his announcement was no mere spiritual or symbolic one. Jesus healed the sick, freed the demon-possessed and gave sight to the blind—not just in a spiritual sense but physically as well. When Jesus touched the deaf and the blind they heard and saw with their *physical* ears and eyes. They were not just spiritually enlightened. Jesus is the Messiah who brings the literal fulfillment of the Jubilee provisions for justice. Thus Jesus' healings, while certainly in a sense parables of the kingdom, are not to be understood or interpreted only as illustrations

of a "higher" spiritual truth (for example, of Jesus' power to open our eyes spiritually). Jesus' literal, historical healings, like his resurrection, are signs of the literal, historical character and in-breaking of the new order of God's kingdom. Thus also Jubilee is not spiritualized, nor its force blunted, by this interpretation.

Jubilee in Matthew

Luke 4, however, is not the only Jubilee passage in the New Testament. Scholars have noted the Jubilee tone of the Lord's Prayer, especially in the petition "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt 6:12; Lk 11:4),⁸ and also the echoes of Isaiah 61:1-2 in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-6.⁹ Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) is, in fact, a Jubilee proclamation, functioning in Matthew much as the Nazareth discourse does in Luke. Fundamentally and thematically, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 61, just as he did (more explicitly but less fully) in the Nazareth synagogue. The Sermon on the Mount announces Jubilee. Here the present kingdom meaning of Jubilee is set forth. To announce the kingdom is to proclaim "the favorable year of the Lord."

The Sermon on the Mount (especially the Beatitudes) stands in the same relation to the Old Testament Jubilee theme as it does to the Old Testament law (the Old Covenant) generally. On the one hand, the Old Testament Jubilee material reveals God's *character* and *intention* for his people for all time, including New Testament times; on the other hand, Jesus' words show what the Jubilee means concretely *now*, in the New Covenant, and in the kingdom of God, present and future.

A comparison of Matthew 5:3-10 with Isaiah 61:1-2 and Psalm 146:7-8 shows clearly, I think, the Jubilee character of the Beatitudes. Isaiah 61:1-2 depicts the Messiah preaching good news to the poor, the basic and introductory act in his appearance—and this is precisely what Jesus does. He begins to preach to the crowds, and his first words are about the poor, fulfilling the Isaiah prophecy.

Jubilee and Kingdom

The mystery and the stumbling block, of course, are that the kingdom did not suddenly spring into fullness immediately. This is a basic mystery of the kingdom. The answer, however, is not that Jesus intended a spiritual rather than a literal, material coming of the kingdom. That suggestion is a cop-out. The answer is rather the question of *how God chooses to bring in his kingdom*. The kingdom centers in Jesus, and the coming of the kingdom in its fullness on earth still hinges on faith in Jesus and obedience to his word. There is no other way. In Jesus, and in the full coming of his kingdom, God has chosen first of all the power of powerlessness. The kingdom comes through suffering, servanthood and much that the wisdom of this world calls foolishness (1 Cor 1:20—2:7).

But the kingdom finally will come in power, and even in wrath toward all untruth and injustice. The book of Revelation leaves no doubt about that. Revelation 11:15-19, for example, pictures this climax, when “the kingdom of the world” becomes “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15). This prophecy ties in with the Jubilee and with the land, for God’s victory is announced at the blowing of the seventh trumpet (probably a Jubilee motif).¹⁰ God is praised for taking his “great power” and beginning to reign (Rev 11:17). The time for judgment has come, “and for destroying those who destroy the earth” or land (Rev 11:18). So the coming of the kingdom is the coming of the final Jubilee and the deliverance of the earth from all oppression and alienation.

Nothing in the New Testament cancels the breadth, literalness or ecological character of the Old Testament Jubilee theme. God still will bring the Jubilee, the Sabbath of Sabbaths. The New Testament makes clear, however, that the Jubilee comes solely through Jesus Christ. For the church today, the Jubilee theme can serve “as a paradigm of Kingdom action in the world,” as Mortimer Arias says, assisting us “to develop a missionary vision and model in the Kingdom perspective.”¹¹

The Narrow Gate

What does this mean practically? How can the church more intentionally demonstrate the meaning of Jubilee in the world today?

Here are some examples:

1. *Jesus Christ can be presented as the one who brings Jubilee, the liberator from bondage.* Starting with the New Testament, but rooted in the Old, we can lift up Jesus as the Messiah who opens the door to the real Jubilee of the kingdom. This begins with proclaiming and serving the Jesus who comes not only to justify sinners before God but to form a just community which demonstrates Jubilee liberation in the world. If faithful to Jesus' Jubilee message, the church will present Jesus as the one who liberates the oppressed from bondage and who brings final Jubilee in the fullness of the revelation of the kingdom.

2. *The Jubilee gospel focuses on the gospel for the poor.* Jesus makes this unmistakably plain, as we have seen (Mt 5:3-10; 11:5, 28; 25:40; Lk 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21). He fulfills in himself and in his body the prophetic promises of a Messiah who comes to bring justice for the poor and oppressed.

A church infected with kingdom passion will be the presence of Jesus among the poor. It will present Jesus as Savior from sin, Liberator from the bondages of spirit and body, and Ruler who prepares us to welcome his reign. With power and without apology such a church will evangelize among the poor, inviting women and men to experience the new birth and the new life of Christian community. It will disciple converts to become servants and ministers of Jesus Christ in the world. It will build communities of believers whose character is Jubilee.

3. *Jubilee means demonstrated commitment to economic justice in society.* This was the central provision of the ancient Jubilee law, and it continues today because the gospel concerns *koinonia*—how people share the resources of life God has given us.

This liberation begins in the church, as noted in earlier chapters, as Christians work justice for all believing sisters and broth-

ers. But it also means siding with efforts for economic justice in society. The church cannot justly claim Jesus for its own unless it follows him "outside the gate" (Heb 13:12 RSV).

How can the church work Jubilee justice here and now in anticipation of the final kingdom? This will depend on the places of injustice around us, in the neighborhood and around the world. It will mean finding working ways to relieve the poor from bondage, not only through evangelism but also through finding cures for institutionalized injustice. Real Jubilee is not just relief for victims, but structural change to bring justice (Lev 25). Out of their own sense of freedom from sin through Jesus Christ, Jubilee Christians work to eliminate the evil institutionalized in such places as unfair employment practices, discrimination in housing and barriers to providing help to the world's poor. One Jubilee action, for example, might be working to change government policies which reward farmers for not growing food while millions starve in other lands.

The Bible allows no either/or on the Jubilee theme. We take nothing away from the final, full, eschatological meaning of Jubilee when we also stress its present relevance. Rather, in pressing for Jubilee *now*, we are faithful to the gospel and even now spread the leaven of the kingdom.

Conclusion: Seven Themes, One Kingdom

In tracing the biblical themes of peace, land, house, city, justice, Sabbath and Jubilee, we have seen that all are wrapped up with God's kingdom. These seven themes show that the kingdom is much broader, much more profound, than it may at first appear.

In the Old Testament, these themes reveal the character of the kingdom. The kingdom is God's rule actually manifested on earth, based on God's total sovereignty and mighty acts, and including a covenant relationship with God's people whereby they bind themselves to live consistently with God's revealed character. Woven together, these themes provide a comprehensive foundation for the biblical vision of God's kingdom.

John Perkins nicely shows how several of these themes combine when viewed from the perspective of justice, "the highest form of love." Justice in this sense, he says, "means (1) to recognize God as the Creator and owner of the earth, (2) to allow man to scratch into the earth with his own hands and enjoy the fruit of his labor, and (3) to be able to raise one's hands in the praise of God. Justice is to have a sabbath."¹²

The message of the New Testament is that the kingdom has drawn near and become visible in Jesus Christ. This is the "mystery" or "secret" of the kingdom. With the Incarnation, the kingdom is embodied in Jesus—though not unambiguously and not yet in its fullness. Jesus is the King and the agent of the kingdom. And he is now present and reigning through the Holy Spirit who is the foretaste and firstfruit of the church's kingdom witness. The presence of the Spirit, as Lesslie Newbigin has said, "is not the lantern which a traveller in the dark carries in his hand; it is the glow on his face which reflects the coming dawn."¹³

The kingdom centers, above all, in Jesus Christ—the one who has "disarmed the powers and authorities, . . . triumphing over them by the cross" (Col 2:15), who has been raised "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Eph 1:21). Wherever Jesus is, there the kingdom is. Wherever Jesus Christ is working, there the new order is breaking in. Wherever Jesus is working among the poor, there the prophecies that God will bring justice for the poor have their initial fulfillment.

We may summarize the New Testament treatment of these seven kingdom themes by saying that in the New Testament these themes are both *internalized* and *universalized*. Their *inward* thrust is intensified while their *outward* thrust is expanded. To be more precise, in the New Testament we find these themes (1) internalized but not merely spiritualized; (2) universalized but not merely symbolized; (3) partially but not fully realized; and (4) their eschatological focus is clarified but still not fully revealed.

The mystery is dramatically opened and illustrated, but in a way that still leaves us guessing. We are left in awe, for the more we understand, the greater we see is the mystery yet to be revealed.¹⁴

The New Testament weaves these seven themes together to form a consistent, strong theology of the kingdom. Each theme points to Jesus Christ, the person of the kingdom, through whom God's kingdom promises are fulfilled. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, the one who brings justice for the poor, the true builder of the city of God. He promises and brings Sabbath rest, both now and in final Jubilee fullness. And he is the one who redeems his land, his earth, in God's kingdom economy to unite all things in himself and free the whole created order from its bondage to decay.

Have we seen the kingdom? Are we living the kingdom? Is it for us precisely what Jesus said it should be—our highest and greatest quest?