Luka 1:50-55

Sermon: **Whose Is the Kingdom of God?** 2022

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INTRODUCTION

1 Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome back to Bible Perspective. Today we are continuing with the Gospel of Luke, and once again we are returning to Mary's song of praise.

If you remember, I said that if you pray to Mary, I am okay with that.

Let me explain why I see it this way.

Our salvation does not depend on having perfect knowledge of the Bible or getting every teaching exactly right. What matters is having a heart that genuinely wants to know God, love Him, and live according to His will—a heart that God Himself gives to His chosen ones.

So, although the Bible does not teach us to pray to Mary, I do not believe that a person who does so—because that is what they were taught—is excluded from God's salvation.

In other words, if a person has not deliberately rejected God's truth, but has sincerely sought God and accepted what was available to them in the environment in which they grew up, their misunderstanding cannot prevent God from bringing them into His kingdom.

And now I want to speak specifically to those of you who have a heart that genuinely wants to know God. It was because of you that I felt it was so important, throughout these sermons, to show you Mary as the Bible presents her.

As I said in the previous sermon, Mary shows us the kind of relationship we should also want to have with God—a relationship in which we want to know God, understand His words and His promises, believe Him, and bring our lives into alignment with what He tells us.

I wanted to show you Mary as a real woman who heard what God told her, who had to live with the decision she made, and who throughout her life had to grow in faith and in her understanding of what was happening to her.

This is Mary who directs all the glory toward God and toward the Son she will give birth to—the King whom she herself will one day serve in the kingdom that will be established on earth.

Okay.

1.1 Before we continue with Mary's song of praise, I want to briefly remind you of what we talked about in the previous sermon.

In the previous sermon, we talked about how Mary calls God her "Deliverer" and how we should understand that word in the broader context of God's relationship with Israel. We saw that behind that one word, Mary sees the entire history of her people and God's promises that go all the way back to Abraham.

1.2 Then we went through God's foundational promises to Israel—the promise given to Abraham, the covenant with Moses, and the covenant with David. We saw how these promises are connected to one another and how together they create one great biblical narrative.

1.3 After that, we talked about victory over the oppressor. We saw how Mary, knowing the history of Israel and God's promises, expects God to deliver His people through the future King and establish His kingdom.

1.4 And finally, we came to what I believe is one of the most important thoughts in the entire sermon: "God's faithfulness is phenomenal."

Mary recognizes that, after thousands of years, God is still continuing to fulfill His promises. His *phenomenal nature* convinced Mary to make a decision in her heart, and the decision was this: "Your promises, *phenomenal God,* are more important to me than my own life."

Okay.

1.5 Before we move on, I will read for us from (Luke 1:50–55)

"And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; And sent away the rich empty handed. He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, As he spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever." And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.

WHOSE OPINION MATTERS TO YOU?

2 Let's first talk about the topic I called: "Whose opinion matters to you?"

Let's read (Luke 1:50) once again:

"And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him."

2.1 Those who fear God have made a choice. They choose to fear God rather than people.

There is no third option, my dear friends.

The question we should ask ourselves as we grow in the Christian faith is this: Who do we want to impress? In other words, whose opinion matters more to us—God's or man's?

What I have come to understand through studying the Bible, and especially through Jesus' teaching and His life, is that Jesus showed us what it really means to fear God.

Through His life, we can see that what mattered most to Him was what His Father thought of Him, not what people thought of Him.[1]

2.2 The Bible teaches us through Jesus that fearing God means, first and foremost, loving Him, wanting to serve Him, wanting to please Him, and considering His opinion more important than the opinion of any human being.

2.3 This belief is what gave Him the courage and boldness to do what He did. He knew how to separate Himself from people's opinions, and He knew what was important and what needed to be done.

Of course, He did all of this for the good of humanity, but He did not allow other people's opinions to determine Him, not even the opinions of His apostles.[2]

The apostles tried many times to influence Him. And many times, because of that, they received a clear rebuke from Jesus.

In other words, they needed to understand that Jesus had come above all to serve His Father, and that He was calling them to do the same.[3]

And that was definitely not easy for them to do.

I believe that as we study the Gospel of Luke, we will see this for ourselves. We will see that it was not easy for them, and that throughout their journey of faith, they often had to face the question: "Whose opinion matters to you?"

2.4 Now let's apply this message from the Bible to ourselves.

If the opinion of another human being is more important to us than God's opinion, then we have made a very bad decision.

Another human being—*except for one*—cannot give us answers to the most important questions in life, let alone give us what is ultimately most important—which is life after this first death.

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[1] Jesus' relationship with the Father: John 5:30; John 6:38; John 8:28–29; John 12:49–50; Luke 22:42.

[2] Jesus did not allow Himself to be guided by people's opinions: John 5:41–44; John 12:42–43; Matthew 22:15–18.

[3] The apostles could not determine Jesus' path: Matthew 16:21–23; Mark 8:31–33; Luke 9:51–55.

In other words, no one except God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, has ultimate authority over our lives.

That's why Christ calls us to live our lives in a way that pleases the Father.

But how can we know what actually pleases the Father? By continually choosing to get to know His Son.

The more we come to know Jesus Christ and His teaching, the more clearly we come to understand who God the Father really is.

But this process of getting to know God is not something that happens all at once. It is a journey on which the picture gradually becomes clearer to us.

At the beginning of our journey of faith, it can feel like driving a car with fogged-up windows. We keep moving forward, but we cannot see the road ahead clearly. As a result, we feel uncertain and drive more slowly and cautiously because we cannot see what lies ahead. Only when the windows clear up can we see the road clearly and know which way to go.



The same is true of our relationship with God. The more we learn about Christ through His teaching and the way He lived, the better we come to understand who God the Father really is. And as our understanding of the Father grows, we begin to see more clearly how we should live. Just as clear windows help us see the road ahead, knowing God more deeply helps us navigate life with greater wisdom and confidence.

I once heard the Christian apologist John Lennox explain this very well during a podcast discussion. He was asked whether we can know God without the Bible. In his response, he explained the difference between knowing facts about someone and actually knowing that person.

He gave this example: “We can know many things from a distance about a person who lives in our neighborhood. We can know his name, how many children he has, how old he is, and many other things. But that does not mean that we *know* him.

If we really want to get to know him, we have to approach him, talk to him, and get to know his personality. Only then do we begin to understand who he really is.

It is the same with God. It is up to us to decide, of our own free will, whether we really want to know Him. And the way we come to know Him is by getting to know His Son—Jesus Christ, His life, and His teaching."

A wise and simple statement from that Bible teacher, isn't it?

2.5 And this brings us to a fundamental truth about the world we live in. Somewhere along our journey, if we have "eyes to see and ears to hear," we begin to understand and believe that God is the Creator, and we are His creatures.

And with that same conviction, we begin to understand another truth: the people who have great influence over our lives—politicians, rulers, and others in positions of power—are also only *creatures* like us.

Of course, they hold real political and social power. As kings, rulers, priests, and people in positions of authority, they can strongly influence our lives here and now. I am not denying that.

But when we understand who God is, we also begin to understand their place in relation to Him.

They are creatures.

And God is the Creator.

And therefore, no matter how great their role is in this age, and how strongly they can influence our lives, they do not have the ultimate authority that God has.

2.6 Jesus, as our teacher, understood this completely. That is why in *Matthew* 10:28 He tells us:

"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

In other words, it is completely unreasonable to fear man more than God.

But again, we have to come to this understanding.

It is a process that we have to go through. And along that journey, we have to tear down many false idols that have taken the place in our lives that belongs only to God.

2.7 And this brings us back to Mary.

When she says, "From generation to generation He is merciful to those who fear Him," what makes her say that?

I think the answer is quite simple.

Mary knows the history of her people. She knows about her fathers—from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through Joseph and Moses, all the way to King David, the prophets, and other people who feared God.

She read their stories. She heard about them in the synagogue. She knew what had happened in their lives and what kind of relationship they had with God.

And through those stories, she saw exactly what she is talking about now.

Those people were "blessed" because they feared God. Their lives, their testimony, and their relationship with God were evidence of that.[4]

And now Mary sees herself as part of that same story.

She does not see herself as separate from the history of her people. Rather, she recognizes that God has always been faithful to those who fear Him, from one generation to the next.

And therefore, when she speaks about God having mercy on those who fear Him, she is not saying something new. She is saying what she had read in the Scriptures and what she had heard throughout her entire life.

2.8 And that is why, for me, this is another strong piece of evidence of how well Mary knew the Scriptures.

Mary's words have a history behind them.

In other words, her "song of praise" reflects the long history of God's relationship with His people.

2.9 And here is the question for all of us: Where do we stand in this whole story?

I don't know about you, but I have to admit that I am still on that journey. I still have a lot to learn.

But as time goes on, I come to understand more and more deeply what Christ taught and believed: "Fear God, because He and He alone decides the final outcome of your lives."

Okay.

2.10 Let's now go to (Luke 1:51–52), where the text says:

"He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble."

2.11 When Mary speaks about "His arm," she wants to emphasize how powerful God is.

Throughout history, God has shown His strength in defending His people.

And when Mary says that "God has scattered those who are proud in the thoughts of their hearts," I believe she is referring not only to the kingdoms that ruled over Israel in the past, but

[4] Genesis 22:12; Genesis 26:4–5; Genesis 31:42; Genesis 42:18; Exodus 20:18–21; Numbers 12:7–8; Psalm 34:12–15.

also to the powers ruling over her people in her own time—the Roman Empire and King Herod.[5]

Both Rome and Herod were powerful, and they acted as though their power made them superior to others. They were used to having their own way and expected others to submit to them. In that sense, they were "proud in the thoughts of their hearts."

2.12 But they did not understand what Mary understood.

They did not understand that, despite all their power, they were only part of the story God was telling.

In other words, Mary understood that they had no ultimate right to rule over God's people.

The only true ruler over Israel is God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

And no one else.

Okay.

2.13 Mary goes on to say: "He has brought down rulers from their thrones."

What does she mean by that?

I believe Mary sees the same pattern repeating itself and believes that Rome, too, will one day fall.

It's as if she's saying, "Your time is running out. You will fall, Caesar. You will fall too, King Herod. Israel's rightful King is now being born, and one day He will defeat you all."

In other words, if I'm interpreting this verse correctly, Mary sees the birth of this child as the beginning of the end of Roman rule.

2.14 As I said earlier, when Mary speaks of God's mighty arm, she is pointing to His power to defend His people and bring down those who oppose Him.

And this is not something new in Israel's history. Time and again, powerful nations tried to rule over God's people, but in the end, they too fell.

The Babylonians tried—and they fell. Greece came after them. Alexander the Great created a huge empire, but that empire did not last either. After his death, it broke apart and was divided among his successors.

I believe Mary understood this pattern. And now, in light of Israel's history, it is as if she is saying, "Rome, your turn will come, too. You will fall, just as the great powers before you did."[6]

Okay. Let's continue.

2.15 And then Mary tells us: "And has exalted those who were humble."

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[5] Judges 7:2–22; 1 Samuel 17:45–47; 2 Chronicles 20:14–23; 2 Kings 18:17–19:37.

[6] Daniel 2:36–38; Daniel 5:18–31; Jeremiah 25:11–12; Jeremiah 50:1–3; Daniel 8:20–22; Daniel 11:3–4.

Who does Mary have in mind?

I believe she is speaking specifically about her own people, Israel.

Why does she call them humble?

Because in her time, the Roman Empire was severely oppressing the people of Israel.

The Israelites could do almost nothing without Roman approval. The Romans interfered in almost every aspect of their lives—in the economy, culture, and politics.



2.16 The heavy taxes imposed by the Empire kept them in constant poverty.

And in order to understand at least a little better what the relationship was like between the Roman authorities and the Jewish people, we can look at an event described to us by Josephus.

In the year 66, when the Roman governor Florus came to Jerusalem, he sent a centurion named Capito with fifty soldiers toward the people. Shortly afterward, he ordered his soldiers to plunder the upper marketplace and kill the people they found there. The soldiers entered houses and killed their inhabitants, and some people were brought before Florus, who ordered them to be scourged and crucified. Josephus states that about 3,600 people were killed that day, including women and children.[7]

This gives us at least a small insight into how the Roman authorities *could* treat the people they ruled over.

2.17 But we have to be fair to the whole picture. The Romans were not the only ones oppressing the people of Israel. When we look at the accounts in the Bible, we see that the people were also burdened by their own religious leadership.

The religious leadership, especially those connected with the Temple system, had great authority over the people. We are talking about people such as the Sadducean priests the high

[7] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book 2, Chapter 14, §§ 297–305.

priest, the Pharisees, and the teachers of the Law; we are talking about people who belonged to the social and political elite of their time.

In other words, while the ordinary people carried the various burdens imposed on them by the religious system, those who controlled the Temple benefited from the position and the system they administered.



I believe that Mary, as a devout and wise woman of her time, understood both realities very well. She knew that her people were not only under pressure from Roman rule, but also burdened by their own religious system.[8]

2.18 That is why Mary rejoices in the day when this will change, and we can clearly see this throughout her song of praise.

In (Luke 1:53) she says:

"He has filled the hungry with good things; And sent away the rich empty handed."

Here, I believe, she is not primarily talking about physical hunger, but about people who are hungry for righteousness—people who are hungry to obey God's law, to live in peace, and to bring their lives into alignment with God's will.

And now, finally, those who are righteous in God's eyes will be filled.

In other words, everything that was promised in the Old Testament is now, according to Mary's understanding, beginning to be fulfilled.

Israel will once again become a great nation, as it was during Solomon's reign, when its wisdom and prosperity attracted the attention of other nations. But this time, under the rule of Jesus Christ, God's promises will be fulfilled in their fullness. Israel will become an example and a model for the nations of the world.

[8] Matthew 23:1–7; Luke 11:37–46; Mark 12:38–40; John 11:47–50; Acts 4:5–6.

That is what Mary believed as she spoke her song of praise.

2.19 The last thing Mary says is that God "sent the rich away empty-handed."

Mary knows who she is talking about. In her time, the rich are those who enjoy wealth and power. But Mary believes that one day, through the Son she is about to give birth to, they too will be brought down.

WHOSE IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

3 Okay. The next topic I have called: "Whose Is the Kingdom of God?"

But before I start talking about this topic, let's read (Luke 1:54–55)

"He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, As he spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever."

3.1 If we read this text through our Gentile eyes, through the lenses of Christian tradition and church traditions, it is very easy to miss its actual meaning.

And what do I mean by that?

I believe that, over the centuries, the Church as a religious institution gradually moved away from the Old Testament and eventually began to teach: "The Old Testament is for the Jews, and the New Testament is for Christians."

And what happened to the Church also happened to me. I grew up in a part of the world where the Church has had a strong influence for centuries on how people understand God, the Bible, and their faith. So, when I began to study the Bible seriously for myself, I naturally approached the text with an understanding already shaped by the religious tradition and culture I had grown up in.

In other words, because I knew so little about the Old Testament back then—and still have much to learn today—I spent a long time thinking that this was primarily talking about me as a member of the Church, rather than about the people of Israel.

But as I began to understand the Old Testament better, I also began to realize just how important Mary's words really are.

3.2 And before I continue explaining the topic "Whose Is the Kingdom of God?", I first want to give a brief historical introduction and show how the main Christian traditions throughout history have understood these words of Mary.

For example, the Catholic tradition recognizes God's faithfulness to the promises He made to Israel and Abraham, and understands their fulfillment through Christ and the New Covenant.

The Orthodox tradition takes a similar view. It also understands Mary's song as a celebration of God's faithfulness to Israel and His promise to Abraham and his descendants, fulfilled through Christ.

The Protestant tradition, particularly the Reformation tradition, also recognizes God's faithfulness to His promises to Israel and Abraham. It emphasizes that through Christ, Gentiles who believe are included among Abraham's descendants and share in the blessings God promised him.

So, all three traditions recognize the connection between Christ, Israel, and God's promise to Abraham. They differ, however, in how they understand the relationship between Israel, Christ, and the Church.

And that is exactly the question I want to open up here.

When Mary says that God “has given help to Israel His servant” and remembers the promise given to Abraham and his descendants, should we immediately transfer her words to the Church and to ourselves as Gentile Christians? Or should we first understand them within the story of Israel and the promises God gave to them?

3.3 In other words, is the Church right when it says that we, as the church people, have now taken over the role of the new chosen people, or is it not?

In order to answer that question, we first have to decide what we are going to do with the Old Testament. Are we going to put the Old Testament aside, put that book on a shelf to collect dust, and try to understand the New Testament without its Old Testament context? Or are we going to connect the Old Testament with the New Testament into one complete story?

As far as I am concerned, the Old Testament is not some separate part of the Bible that was intended only for the Jews and then, with the coming of Christ, stopped being important to us Christians. It is the framework. It is the foundation without which we do not have the complete picture.

3.4 Yes, the Old Testament is long and sometimes boring, I admit.

But at the same time, it contains incredibly rich and inspiring stories that reveal God’s character—His holiness, greatness, power, patience, and wisdom.

In other words, a person has to be deeply motivated and committed if they want to grasp the whole story and understand how everything connects with everything else.

3.5 Unfortunately, many times throughout history, the opposite happened. Bible teachers depended more on church tradition than on the whole story that Scripture tells us.

Although I cannot know precisely what motives drove every individual teacher to behave this way, we can recognize some circumstances that certainly had a major influence. One of them was reverence for the authority of the Church. Another was the power and position a person could gain through church authority. And there was also a very real fear of the consequences that could follow if someone openly opposed the official teaching of the Church.

I think certain periods of the Middle Ages show us very well just how powerful that church authority could be and how difficult it could be to question what the Church officially taught.

In other words, throughout history, we in Western civilization gradually came to accept the Church as the final authority on how Scripture should be understood. We passed down its teachings from one generation to the next, and over time, those teachings shaped the way we read the Bible. Unfortunately, even today, we often read Scripture through that inherited understanding rather than approaching the text with fresh eyes.

My dear friends, I want to tell you something important. I want to do the very opposite of what I have just been talking about. I don't want you to accept what I say simply because you think I have some special authority. I have no authority of my own. *Scripture, as faithfully interpreted and taught by Jesus Christ, is the standard by which everything I say must be judged.*

As I have said many times, it is up to you to decide, of your own free will, whether what I am saying makes sense or not.

And that is exactly why I repeat: if we separate the Old Testament from the New Testament, we will be left without a clear and complete picture of what God wants to show us. And He wants to show us His story in its entirety, His complete narrative from beginning to end.

3.6 But who taught me that I could question the Church's authority and examine its teachings for myself? Who showed me that I have the freedom to think critically about Church tradition and compare its claims with what Scripture actually says? Who set that example for me?

The answer is Jesus. He is the main reason I learned to approach Scripture this way.

He is the one who led me to do this. Primarily through what we read about Him in the Gospels.

When we look at how Jesus approached the reality He was facing, we see that He did not blindly accept the authority of the religious leaders of His time. On the contrary, He always went back to Scripture and to the authority of God’s Word.

In other words, did Jesus Himself treat Scripture as the ultimate authority?

I believe He did.

Just imagine what would have happened if Jesus had thought like many Bible teachers who simply accept what they have inherited from the Church tradition they grew up in. What if Jesus had simply accepted the authority of the religious leaders of His time and said, “You're right. I won't question you. I'll just keep teaching what you teach.”

If that had happened, my dear friends, the Gospel would not exist. The New Testament would not exist.

But thank God, that did not happen.

Jesus boldly and courageously confronted the religious leaders of His time with the truth that came from Scripture—from the Old Testament.

And we see this throughout His discussions with the Pharisees, the chief priests, and other religious leaders. When He presented His arguments, He always went back to the authority of the Old Testament to confirm the truth of what He was saying.

In other words, He did not rely on His own authority, but on the authority of Scripture.

And that is why I think it is important that we also try to read the New Testament in the same way—with the entire Old Testament in the background.

3.7 If we accept this paradigm that Christ had and that the apostles had, we begin to see something that is very easy to lose sight of.

And that is this: Mary is not primarily speaking about the Church here. She is primarily speaking about Israel. She is speaking about God who has given help to Israel, His servant, and who remembers the mercy He promised to the fathers of their nation—to Abraham and his descendants.

This shows again that throughout the entire Old Testament, and then through the New Testament, the *same story* is unfolding. God gave promises to Abraham. Then He continued to develop them through Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David. And throughout that entire narrative, we see that God does not forget what He has promised.

3.8 And now Mary is actually saying that with the birth of this child, this promise will begin to be fulfilled. Israel will once again take its place in God's plan.

God will be their God and their King, and they will be His people.

And it is precisely through this people that blessing will come to the other nations.

In other words, God's promises flow from the Old Testament into the New Testament, while at the same time, through progressive revelation, we can see more and more clearly how those promises will be fulfilled.

Some of you may be asking, "Danijel, what do you mean when you say that blessing will come to the other nations through Israel?"

3.9 I'll answer that question briefly for now, because we'll explore this topic in more detail in future sermons.

Let me show you an example from Israel's history that gives us a glimpse of what God has promised for the future.

We can already see a glimpse of this during Solomon's reign.

Of course, what God will do in the future will be far greater. The Old Testament promises describe events that will unfold on a much greater scale and in much greater detail. But this event from Solomon's time can help us better understand what I mean.

Solomon was a great and wise king, and his wisdom and fame attracted rulers from the surrounding nations. Think of the Queen of Sheba, who traveled a great distance to hear Solomon's wisdom and see what God had accomplished through him.

And there was a reason kings came to hear Solomon's wisdom. They could see that he ruled his kingdom in a remarkable way and that God had blessed it with everything a kingdom could need to prosper. They wanted to see this for themselves, so they came to hear his wisdom.

They understood that Solomon's wisdom and prosperity came from God, but they also saw that God's blessing extended beyond the king himself to the entire nation he ruled. What they saw was a society unlike any other around it, a nation ordered and blessed in a remarkable way.[9]

And that is why I wanted to share this story from the past with you.

But there is another important part of this picture that we need to understand. The apostle Paul explains it in *Romans* 11, where he compares God's people to an olive tree. Some of the natural branches were broken off, and wild branches—that is, Gentiles—were grafted in among the remaining branches. Through this, Gentiles became participants in the richness of the tree. But Paul also warns them not to boast over the natural branches, because they do not support the root; the root supports them.

In other words, Gentiles are included in the blessings of God's promises, but those promises did not begin with them. They go back to God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. And Paul does not say that God's purposes for Israel have simply come to an end. In *Romans* 11:25–27, he speaks about the fullness of the Gentiles coming in, and then declares that the Deliverer will come from Zion and that God will take away the sins of Jacob. Paul connects this with God's covenant with them.

So we need to hold these two things together. God brings the Gentiles into the blessings of His promises, but He has not forgotten the promises He made to Israel. The time will come when the Deliverer returns and establishes His kingdom, and God's promises will be fulfilled. Then the words God spoke to His people will be fully realized: “I will be their God, and they will be My people.”[10]

But as I said, Solomon’s kingdom was only a faint picture of what, according to the Old Testament promises that Paul refers to, will happen on a much greater scale when Christ establishes His kingdom.

Can we just imagine what that society will look like when Christ is King? God will have a people to whom He will give a new heart, just as the prophet Malachi describes.

That people will live together with their King in righteousness in the promised land that God gave to their fathers. That kingdom will be in Israel, and King Jesus will rule from Jerusalem.

And we who belong to Christ, that is, all His chosen ones who have lived and died throughout history, will be resurrected and will live and reign with Him in the millennial kingdom.

In other words, Christ will rule from Israel, and His righteousness will spread throughout the whole earth, and we will help Him in this.

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[9] 1 Kings 10:1–9, 23–25; 2 Chronicles 9:1–8.

[10] Romans 11:17–29; Genesis 17:7–8; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Revelation 21:3.

Then the rulers of other nations will come to hear the wisdom of Jesus Christ, just as they came to hear Solomon's wisdom in Solomon's time. It will be the most righteous society that has ever existed in history.[11]

What a sight that will be! This is not just a good story, my dear friends. It will really happen!

And that is why, through this event from the past, I wanted to turn your hearts, at least a little, toward what awaits us in the future according to God's promises.

And if what I have just shared with you does not motivate you to seriously consider what Scripture tells us, then I don't know what will.

3.10 Okay. Now that you have had a brief look at why I believe we should look at Scripture in this way, I want to return to the Church and try to answer the question: Whose is the Kingdom of God?

My own journey is an important part of the answer to that question. The two are closely connected, so I want to bring them together and be as honest with you as possible.

In other words, I have already shared my answer to that question, but I believe I owe you an explanation of how I arrived at my current conviction: that the Church does not hold the key to the Kingdom of God.

As I studied the Old Testament, I began to see things differently. The more I examined what Scripture actually said, the more I realized that this new understanding made more sense than what I had believed before. It gave me a clearer and more coherent picture of the biblical narrative.

At the same time, this process was painful for my mind, my ego, and my soul.

Why? Because even as I read the Old and New Testaments, I kept trying to put myself and my church tradition at the center of the story. And the more I tried to do that, the harder it became to make everything fit.

In other words, my conscience would not let me rest. It kept pushing me toward the truth of Scripture, even though I was still unwilling to accept it.

But eventually, I reached a point where I could no longer ignore my conscience. I accepted what it was telling me.

From that point on, everything gradually began to fall into place, and I began to see how all the pieces fit together.

But as I reflected on my own experience, I began to wonder whether other Bible teachers throughout history had faced similar situations.

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[11] Revelation 21:24–26; Isaiah 60:3–11; Psalm 72:10–11.

I know a Bible teacher who has gone through a similar process. He is now around eighty years old, and he grew up within the Church and its traditions. He has since become a good friend of mine. His teaching and example helped me face the very questions that had been troubling my conscience.

His experience has shown me that I am not the only one who has struggled with these questions. And if someone who grew up within the Church could go through a similar process in our own time, it is reasonable to ask whether other Bible teachers throughout history faced similar crossroads.

Based on my own experience and what I have learned from him, I believe some Bible teachers may have faced a similar choice but nevertheless chosen to put the Church at the center, perhaps for some of the reasons I mentioned earlier. Of course, I cannot know whether all of them faced such a choice, but I believe some did.

3.11 Okay. Now I want to turn from my own experience to the history of the Church and examine the question that arose from my journey. But I want to approach this carefully.

My own experience has helped me understand why someone might put the Church at the center of God's plan, but it cannot explain how the Church developed its understanding of its role throughout history. That development was shaped by many different events and circumstances, including wars, political conflicts, changes in government, and changes within Judaism itself. All of these influenced the relationship between Jews and Christians over the centuries.



In the first century, some Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah, while others rejected Him. The early Christian movement included both Jews and Gentiles who listened to the apostles and their co-workers. Some accepted their teaching, while others opposed it. Over time, these different responses and many other developments shaped the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people.

For that reason, I do not believe we can point to one particular event and say, “This is when the Church decided to take over the role of God's people.” Nor can I identify one single reason why the Church gradually came to see itself as the center of God's plan. The history is too complex for me to draw such a definite conclusion.

3.12 But when I tried to make sense of all these developments, one thing kept coming back to my mind: the human desire to be at the center of the story. I believe this desire played an important role in how the Church came to understand its place in God's plan. After all, we naturally want to believe that what we believe and what we proclaim to be true belongs at the center of everything.

And I believe this tendency is still evident today. In many of its forms, the Church continues to see itself as the central interpreter of God's plan. In other words, it is difficult to give up a position that you believe belongs to you.

3.13 Okay, let's continue. I'm still working through this timeline, trying to understand which events, historical facts, and theological ideas belong in the picture and which conclusions I need to reconsider. So please bear with me. We haven't finished this investigation yet.

To a certain extent, I agree with all the Christian traditions I mentioned earlier. In their own ways, they all emphasize that God's promises are fulfilled through Christ. And that is true.

But I don't believe those promises were completely fulfilled at Christ's first coming.

If we know the Old Testament, we know that God promised His people a physical land, a kingdom, and a real relationship with Him: “I will be your God, and you will be My people.”

The Israelites lived in the Promised Land for thousands of years, but when we look at their entire history, we have to acknowledge that God's promises were never fulfilled in their fullness.

That is why I find it difficult to accept the idea that everything God promised was already fulfilled simply because Christ came.

According to the New Testament, Christ will return to establish His kingdom.[12]

And this brings us to an important question: What makes the most sense when we consider the whole biblical story?

Should we expect God to fulfill His promise of a physical kingdom in the Promised Land, as the Old Testament promises, or should we understand that promise as fulfilled through the Church?

If we believe that everything God promised is fulfilled through Christ and that the Church understands how those promises are fulfilled, then we need to ask an important question:

[12] Matthew 25:31–34; Revelation 19:11–16; Revelation 20:4–6; 1 Corinthians 15:24–25.

Where is the Kingdom of God? Is it in heaven? If so, how does that fit with what the Old Testament tells us about the land, Israel, and the kingdom?



On the other hand, if we say that the kingdom will be on earth, then we have to ask another question: Where will it be? Will it be in the Vatican, under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church? Will it be in Russia, under the Orthodox Church? Will it be in America, where Protestantism has had a strong influence? Or will it be in Jerusalem, where they will all rule together?

And if they are all going to rule together, then who will actually be the true Church of Christ? Will all these traditions rule the Kingdom of God together? Will they take turns ruling it? Or will they finally agree that the Catholic Church is the one true Church, the Church that has existed since the beginning?

And if that is not the answer, will one Church eventually have authority over all the others, much as America has considerable influence over much of the world today?

Or perhaps the Jehovah's Witnesses are right after all. They believe that Christ will rule from heaven together with the 144,000, while the rest of the saved will live forever on a restored earth.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that these traditions officially teach that the Kingdom of God will be located in the places I have mentioned. Their doctrines differ, and I am aware of that. My point is different. I want you to consider the irony of how these traditions have developed throughout history, where their authority has become concentrated, and how they have come to understand their place in God's plan. Their official teachings may differ, but their historical development raises a question worth considering: Have they, in practice, come to place themselves at the center of the very Kingdom they claim to explain?

3.14 In the end, the historical development of the Church led to divisions, new ideas, new Christian movements, and new ways of understanding the Bible. If we start with the earliest

major Christian tradition and then look at how other movements emerged from it throughout history, we can see an *interesting pattern*. Each, in one way or another, tried to correct what the previous tradition had taught. Yet in doing so, they continued to make the same mistake: interpreting the New Testament without taking the full context of the Old Testament into account.

In other words, I see a *certain inconsistency* in this historical development, one that was already present from the beginning. These movements broke away from earlier traditions, questioned their teachings, and developed new ways of understanding the Bible. Yet, to a large extent, they continued to build their understanding on the same basic pattern. That is why I see their development as evidence of the very problem I am trying to point out.

Of course, I am sure many of those who belong to these traditions would disagree with me. But my intention is not to pass judgment on each individual tradition. Rather, I want to show you why I came to the conclusion that we cannot properly understand the New Testament if we separate it from the context of the Old Testament.

3.15 Through the questions I have just asked, I wanted to show you what I see as a problem with the different theological ideas that have developed throughout the history of Christianity. I wanted you to understand why some of their conclusions seem illogical and inconsistent to me, and why I have come to understand the biblical narrative in the following way.

I believe the kingdom will be established in Jerusalem, precisely where the Old Testament narrative has been pointing all along: to the time when the King will rule over His people and fulfill God's promises.

In other words, when I bring together what the Old Testament says and what the New Testament says, and follow the direction of the entire biblical story, this understanding makes the most sense to me.

3.16 Likewise, I hope you can see the difference between my approach and that of other teachers. I have nothing personal to gain from presenting this understanding of Scripture. I am simply trying to understand God's plan and share with you what I believe His Word teaches.

In other words, I am simply trying to encourage us to listen to God and pay attention to His plan. If He has decided to carry out His plan of blessing through one people all the way to the end, who am I, or who are you, to oppose Him?

All of this brings me back to Jesus Christ.

Christ did not ask people to accept His teaching simply because of His position. Throughout His teaching, He kept bringing people back to Scripture and showing them how God's Word should be understood.

That is why I do not want you to accept what I am saying simply because I am the one saying it. Instead, I want us to go back to Scripture together and ask whether my understanding of God's Word is in line with what Jesus taught.

Christ is the example I want us to follow. He alone perfectly understood and faithfully taught God's Word, showing how God's promises fit together throughout the whole biblical narrative, from beginning to end.

In other words, when I found something in Scripture that did not agree with what had been handed down to me or with what I personally wanted to believe, I had to be willing to say, “God, maybe I am wrong. Maybe what I have believed so far is not what You are telling me.”

My dear friends, when you are honestly and humbly willing to ask yourself those questions, that is precisely the moment when you choose to believe God rather than yourself.

3.17 And finally, to answer the question we started with: “Whose is the Kingdom of God?”

It is not Catholic. It is not Orthodox. It is not Protestant. It is not the kingdom of the Jehovah's Witnesses. It is not Islamic. It is not even Jewish, although it will be established through Israel.

It is God's kingdom.

In other words, the fact that God has decided to establish His kingdom through Israel does not mean that the kingdom belongs to Israel. Ultimately, it belongs to God and to His Son, Jesus Christ.

Let me finish this sermon with one final thought. As Christians, we must be willing to examine what we believe and decide for ourselves what we accept as true. I cannot make that decision for you. As someone who is trying to teach you, all I can do is communicate as clearly as possible what I understand Scripture to be saying. You must examine it for yourself and decide whether you believe it to be true.

Amen.