



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 137

What about the Old Testament believers? If the kingdom of God came with the advent of Christ then what about the Old Testament believers? Were they not part of the kingdom of God? Was Christ not their King? As seen in the study of the covenant of grace, which God established after the fall, and which was unfolded in a series of covenants culminating in the new covenant, though having differences in form and administration, has an essential unity and continuity between all of these covenants. The new covenant, though spoken of as a new work of God, did not mean something utterly new that had never happened before; rather the Bible explains that this work would be new in the sense that it would be much greater in extent and outcome than His work in the past, a more glorious covenant.

Just as the new covenant was actually established with the advent and work of Christ and not before (Hebrews 9:15; 10:9; 12:24), so also the kingdom of God was established with the advent of Christ and not before. The promised Messiah King needed to appear, as the God-man, to dwell among men, to proclaim the arrival of a new phase of God's rule on earth, to bring His people out of captivity through a new exodus, and to inaugurate His kingdom. And so in this sense the kingdom of God is a distinctive New Testament reality. However, having defined the kingdom of God as that special and unique realm of blessing where people willingly and joyfully acknowledge and bow to God's rule, in that sense we can say that this kingdom of God has existed on earth ever since the fall of man. Though we often refer to the church of the New Testament as the church of God, in reality the church of God is as old as Adam and Eve. There is and has always been one continuous covenant people of God, the true church or Israel of God, throughout both Testaments (Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8; 11:17-20; Galatians 3:7-9, 29; 6:16).

Though Jesus in His divine nature, as the eternal Son of God, ruled over the kingdom of believers in the Old Testament, this kingdom was officially and publicly bestowed upon Him, as the God-man, at His ascension (Acts 2:29-36; Philippians 2:5-11). Having accomplished His work as the last Adam, Jesus possessed according to His humanity what He always had according to His divinity. As Old Testament believers were saved by God based on the work of Christ, which was yet a future work, so by virtue of this they also belonged to the church or kingdom of God, even though the new phase of this kingdom was yet future. To say anything else would be to create a radical distinction between the people of God.

Kingdom of power – Besides His kingdom of grace, Christ has a kingdom of power, where having been exalted to the right hand of God, with all power and authority having been conferred on Him, Jesus rules over and governs the entire universe for the benefit of His church (Matthew 11:27; 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:20-23). This is not referring to the divine nature of Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Logos before the incarnation (John 1:1); rather, this is referring to the incarnate Jesus Christ, the God-man, who by virtue of His resurrection has become the Lord of the universe, which He created and has always sustained, but which now He upholds as the God-man (Hebrews 1:1-4).

Christ's kingdom of power is subordinate to His kingdom of grace, where Christ providentially governs all things – be it angels, demons, believers, unbelievers, nations, powers, events and actions; directing them as His means and instruments, to serve and bring about His purposes for the benefit of His church, namely, the protection of His church against the powers of evil, the edification and growth of His church, and the progressive sanctification and final glorification of all His people. Christ is even now reigning in power over the universe, and this will continue until His plan of redemption has been accomplished for the church, and all His enemies have been defeated (Psalm 110:1; 2:8-12; 1 Corinthians 15:25), including death (1 Corinthians 15:26), and His kingdom consummated. The God-man will then hand over the mediatorial kingdom of power bestowed upon Him to His Father, and will subject Himself to Him so that "God may be all in all." Christ's second coming will thus mark the consummation, not the beginning, of His mediatorial (messianic) dominion over the universe (1 Corinthians 15:24, 28).