

The Church You Can Read About in the Bible
The Nature of the Church #3
The church is the kingdom of Christ.

Intro: This year one of our themes is "The church you can read about in the Bible."

In our first lesson we looked at what the church is.

In our second lesson we looked at Jesus' promise to build His church.

In our third lesson we learned how people can become a member of the Lord's church.

Now we are looking at the question, "What did God intend that the church be and do?" What was His purpose for establishing the church? What is its nature? What is its mission or work?

One way to answer that question is to look at the way the church is described in Scripture.

In our first lesson we saw that it is described as the temple of God.

In our second lesson we saw that it is described as the body/bride of Christ.

The church is described in Scripture as the kingdom of God.

Some might find it objectionable to use the words "church" and "kingdom" as synonyms since in broad terms the church may describe the saved, but the kingdom may describe the larger sphere of Christ's rule. I get that; however when Jesus promised to build His church, he immediately associated it with the promised kingdom of heaven:

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:18–19)

Did Jesus promise to build one thing and then promise Peter the keys to something else? Hardly! Peter's role as royal steward of King Jesus gave him the authority to declare God's will for the church.

When the church was established, it was likewise associated with the coming of the kingdom of God.

The message that produced the church was called the gospel or good news of the kingdom.

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike." (Acts 8:12)

Note that people entered the kingdom the same way they entered the church, i.e. through faith and baptism (Cf. Ac. 2:41).

Those who made up the church were said to have been translated into the kingdom of Jesus.

To the church at Colossae Paul wrote:

“For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,” (Colossians 1:13)

Likewise to the Thessalonians:

“so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thessalonians 2:12)

But what does God want to say about the church by describing it as the kingdom of Jesus Christ?

First the church as kingdom suggests that the church is the fulfillment of the OT promise of the coming King and His kingdom. The theme of God's kingdom binds together both testaments. Consider this:

Originally when God saved Israel from Egyptian bondage, brought them to Mt. Sinai and entered into a covenant with them, they were said to be God's kingdom on earth.

Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel. (Exodus 19:5–6)

Physical Israel constituted the kingdom of God in the OT. God was their king; and they were His subjects, However when Israel sought a human king, God made clear that He had been rejected as Israel's king:

And the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. (1 Samuel 8:7)

That decision would prove disastrous for Israel. Israel's human kings ultimately led them into apostasy and captivity. However the prophets declared that God would raise up a righteous king from David's lineage to rule over the nation, thus establishing God's kingdom once more. That's why both John and Jesus summarized their gospel the way they did:

*“NOW in those days John the Baptist *came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”” (Matthew 3:1–2)*

So then after Jesus ascended to heaven, Peter declared that Jesus was the Messianic king the OT prophets had spoken about and that the church was His kingdom (that is, those who were His willing subjects).

Not surprisingly Peter would take the language God had used to describe Israel and use it to describe the church:

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (1 Peter 2:9)

The kingdom of God today is not the physical nation of Israel, but rather those believing Jews and Gentiles who acknowledge and submit to Jesus as their king. Paul in Ephesians 2 said that the Gentiles had been "strangers to the commonwealth of Israel;" but through Jesus' reconciling death they too could have access to God in His kingdom. Thus:

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,” (Ephesians 2:19–20)

That by the way is evidence that we do not have to look for some future establishment of Jesus' kingdom on earth at Jesus' second coming as the premillennialists say. The kingdom of OT prophecy exists now!

The church as kingdom suggests that the governing authority of the kingdom is the king, Jesus Christ.

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18)

As important as democracy or representative government is to us, we must accept the idea that the church's government is monarchical, not democratic.

Jesus' word is the law of the church/kingdom.

“And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law.” (1 Corinthians 9:20–21)

Notice that Paul's statement that he was under the law of Christ which also meant that he was not "under the Law of Moses." Paul did regard himself as a subject of the old covenant with its various laws, but rather the law of Jesus.

Jesus' authority as king is mediated through his apostles as his ambassadors:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

The church as kingdom suggests that we are his soldiers in the battle for human minds and hearts.

The church could be said to be the army of King Jesus; yet Jesus made clear that the warfare is not physical.

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." (John 18:36)

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual through the work of teaching and living the principles of the gospel. Paul described his role and that of his fellow-soldiers in the kingdom:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. (2 Corinthians 10:3–7)

It is kingdom imagery that stirred Paul to write to the Ephesians:

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:10–12)

The church as kingdom suggests that we are merely aliens and strangers on this earth.

To be a part of the kingdom of heaven is to recognize that our king is in heaven and that our citizenship is not on this earth.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20–21)

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

The church as kingdom suggests that we are a part of the only thing that will ultimately last.

The Hebrew writer reminded his readers that the same God came down upon Mt. Sinai still speaks from Mt. Zion, his holy habitation. And, just as God's voice shook the earth then, so once more He will shake both heaven and earth in His final day of judgment. But notice this important application:

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; (Hebrews 12:28)

Conclusion: The description of the church as the kingdom of Christ will give us real clarity about the nature of the church--what it is to be and do. The church

shows an understanding of its nature when we submit to Jesus as our king, spreading the good news of His kingdom, fighting the good fight, setting our minds on spiritual things, and living in anticipation of the day when He will deliver His kingdom up to the Father.