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"A Ready Answer"

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I have learned that basic truths have to be in place before we can really make sense of the "tributary" issues. When it comes to the "kingdom of God," the first and foremost truth is that God has *always* been Creator and King over this universe!

God is Always King - God has always been "king" over what He created (Psalm 10:16; 29:10; 45:6; 47) thus, establishing the "kingdom of God" in human history does not involve God becoming something (king/sovereign) that He was not before that time (from His perspective). Some (most?) humans may not be aware of or seriously consider the Universal King in their lives, but that doesn't change ultimate, objective reality. In fact, I am persuaded that the "Kingdom of God" does not have nearly as much to do with God doing/becoming something as with humans realizing something that was already true. Promoting this idea of God as universal sovereign was a central concern of Daniel's ministry in Babylon (Daniel 4:3,17,25-26,32-35; 5:21; 6:26). Therefore, any "establishment" of God's kingdom in earthly history must be a change in how things are handled or perceived on earth. The "establishment of the kingdom of God" upon earth may simply refer to the arrival of the promised Messianic king who, although opposed by earthly-minded men, was "installed" as king by God anyway and then the nations are warned to repent before He returns in judgment - that is the picture presented in Psalm 2. This will become even clearer as we examine the topic of "the kingdom" as it develops in the Old Testament.

Old Testament "Kingdom" Roots - The issue of the "nature" of the kingdom is unavoidable from its first mention. This occurred at Mt. Sinai, when God established His covenant with the nation of Israel and clearly declared His intention and desire for them to be a "holy nation and kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:5,6). From the beginning, God's "kingdom plans" for Israel do not appear to have had anything to do with a capital city, palaces, and an earthly-styled monarchy, but it is rather clear that His intention was for Israel to be a holy, priestly kingdom of covenant-keepers. Thus, my first thoughts are that "God's Kingdom" doesn't begin or stop with God becoming or ceasing to be King in the universal scheme, but with earthly people (especially God's "covenant people") recognizing or rejecting this idea.

This obsession with Israel having an earthly monarchy does not appear to have originated with God. So, where did it come from? According to Scripture, it seems that this notion came from the same place as the desire for the earthly Temple building - the desires of men. Feeling guilty about his own palace compared with the Tabernacle, David decided that God needed a glorified earthly Temple building (2Samuel 7:1-7). In much the same way, Israelites themselves (although called by God to be different from other nations) decided that they wanted to copy the geo-political system of their neighbors. This was anticipated when the "kingdom discussion" initiated in Exodus 19 resumed a generation later - in *Deuteronomy* we learn that when Israel is

settled in Canaan, they are going to want an earthly monarchy (17:14), upon which God placed some restrictions ahead of time (17:15-20).

As we move into the era of the Judges, we first find Gideon dealing with this issue as the Israelites asked him to establish a dynasty after his defeat of the Midianites. His response is interesting - he refused because Israel already had a king - God (Judges 8:22-23). The ancient Israelites understood the “keep on asking, seeking, and knocking” approach very well, for this would not be the last request for an earthly monarchy.

1Samuel - The last judge, Samuel, was followed by his own two sons that did not have his spiritual stature, so Israel’s elders approached Samuel with a request and this episode during Samuel’s ministry is crucial for understanding the kingdom issue. Israel’s elders wanted an earthly monarchy “like all the nations” (8:5). As any father would, Samuel took the spiritual failure of his sons and the elders’ request rather hard, but God told him that this request was not, primarily, a slam against Samuel or his family - it amounted to a REJECTION OF GOD AS ISRAEL’S KING (8:6-8). Don’t miss this, because the Divine commentary on this (through chapters 8-12) reveals the real foundation of much confusion about the kingdom. This request for an earthly monarchy was NOT a good thing - it was a rejection of God and Samuel described it for what it was (10:17-19; 12:12-25). Samuel related to the Israelites what such a monarchy would cost them (8:9-22) and they still wanted it, but after only three kings Israel was begging for “kingdom-lite” (1Kings 12:1-4) and the northern ten tribes were willing to leave the kingdom ruled by David’s lineage to get out from under it.

There you have it, the real pedigree of the notion of an earthly Israelite monarchy must be traced from a fleshly human desire to copy the political systems of Israel’s pagan neighbors. God ruled over Israel very well prior to the rejection of His rule during Samuel’s ministry - He provided for their needs in the wilderness, delivered the Promised Land to them, etc. Judging from what things were like before the monarchy began, when “God was their king” (Judges 8:22-23; 1Samuel 12:12), I believe that the “Kingdom” slated to appear in the fourth kingdom from Daniel’s time would probably more like what God did then rather than the earthly pagan geo-political systems that Israel’s elders thought “looked better”! In other words, I expect the “Messiah’s Kingdom” to again be the direct rule of the invisible God over His covenant people, something more like the church than the glorified earthly “millennial monarchy” envisioned by the Jews in Jesus’ time and by dispensationalists now. (to be continued)