

Welcome to "Retreat 2010"



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February 6, 2009

Session #4

You may be a bit unfamiliar with the “*kingdom of God*” being the organizing theme of all the Bible

The reason we may be unfamiliar with this theme is that we don't understand what the “*kingdom of God*” is from Scripture
Most people get a European picture of a king with his subjects and with this as our metaphor then God is our king and we are his subjects and we must do what He says or He will wipe us out. And this tends to make us think that the Bible is all about God's authority and you better obey Him or else.

So the only hope we have is to start obeying and we are left with a Christ-less understanding of the gospel

We have the wrong mental picture of the kingdom. The Bible was not written in the 17th Century in Britain but it was written in the ancient near east.

In context of the cultures of Mesopotamia, the Hittites and the fertile crescent

They all practiced the culture of ancient near east treaties
There is a treaty format between the Suzerain and the vassal

Suzerain simply means the great king

Vassal means the subordinate who has to obey the great king

Examples: In Egypt the Pharaoh has to obey the great king
The Pharaoh was a visible icon of the sun god Amun-Ra who was the greatest of the Egyptians gods
Pharaoh was considered divine because he was an earthly representative of the sun god.

Therefore the sun god was the suzerain and Pharaoh was the vassal and he had to do what the great god demanded of him Pharaoh ruled in the authority of Amun-Ra and regarded as divine In Mesopotamia they didn't view the king as divine but did view him as the representative of the gods

The human king the king of the Babylonians was the representative. Each of these cultures built temples for their gods as an earthly representation of the temples of their gods in heaven

Turn to **1 Chronicles Chapter 28 verse 5** “Of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons), He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.

The earthly king is sitting on the throne of God's kingdom. Because he is the representative of God's kingdom.

2 Chronicles 9:8 “Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you, setting you on His throne as king for the LORD your God; because your God loved Israel establishing them forever, therefore He made you king over them, to do justice and righteousness.”

God is the suzerain which is the great king and Solomon is the vassal or the lesser king

The key is to see a relationship between the suzerain and the vassal and the relationship between them is called an oath, covenant or a treaty. And it is important to note that this oath is a non-negotiable from the standpoint of the vassal king.

Illustration:

Imagine the king of Egypt is now ready to expand his territory, he is not satisfied with just the land around the Nile
He has his eyes set on the land of the Hittites
So he takes his great army up to the land of the Hittites and prepares to take it over. His army is more than twice as big as the Hittites.

And since the Hittites see they are outnumbered they surrender. Instead of killing vast numbers of men on both sides there is a treaty that is drawn up. Instead of being killed they can survive but they will have to be a dependent vassal kingdom.

The Pharaoh king (*the suzerain king*) says he will allow them to survive and he can stay on as king of the Hittites (*the vassal king*)

- as long as you acknowledge Pharaoh as your lord.
- as long as you are loyal to Pharaoh and fight against his enemies and be allies with those who are his friends
- and you must pay 3000 talents of gold and silver each year as a tribute If you are attacked by any of your enemies then I will come and protect you.
- But if you are in fact disloyal to me then I will come with my army and wipe you out. In case you are tempted to be disloyal when I am not looking may the vultures pluck out your eyeballs and eat your flesh if you should break the terms of this covenant.

The suzerain treaties normally contain the following stipulations;

One - there is a preamble in which the author of the treaty, the great king, identifies his title

Two - the historical prologue, bringing information about what the relationship was in the past and where the relationship is as of today

Third - the stipulations of what you have to do - remain loyal

Fourth - the documentary clause, if the vassal changes the terms of the clause then may his wife be barren and his eyes be plucked out by vultures, they were to make two copies of this agreement

Fifth - the divine witness, here they invoked the gods to watch over the treaty between the two parties

Six - the curses and the blessings based on the obedience and disobedience to the terms of the treaty

This treaty was written around 1300-1400 BC

The Bible is using the practice of the suzerain treaties which is the ancient near eastern culture, and this is a communication vehicle that God uses when writing the OT.

Side note: We can even see this in the NT as God uses Matthew, Mark and Luke to address three specific people groups
Matthew is written specifically to the Jews, while Mark is written to the Romans and Luke to the Gentiles

- 1 Kings Chapter 9:1-9 (reads like a suzerain treaty)
- Deuteronomy 17:18-20 (God commanded that the king make a copy of the law and keep it by his side and rule according to that law)

The Mosaic law is thus the legal instrument by which the great King, that is God is administering His kingdom over the vassal king which is David or Solomon.

The people of the vassal king will obtain the blessing of the great king as the vassal king is obedient.

If the vassal king is disloyal to the great king then the subjects of the vassal king could be wiped out based on the actions of the vassal king

And you see this in the book of the Kings with the various kings of the northern and southern kingdoms.

So goes the king then so goes the people. And the king if he was bad would bring curses on the people. However if the king was good then he would bring blessings on the people.

King Josiah was a good king, he restores worship, rediscovers the scroll and he leads the people of God back to obedience

The European concept of kingdom on has two parties the monarch king and his subjects and we had better obey or he will punish us or wipe us out.

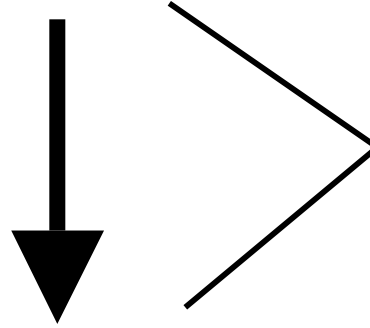
The ancient near eastern have 3 elements,

- the great King which is God Himself,
- the human king that is the vassal king,
- the people under the vassal king

The relationship between the people and the great King is mediated by obedience of the vassal king.

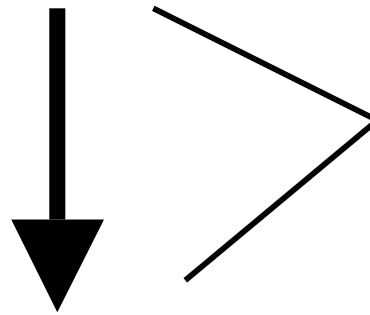
Jesus is God's obedient vassal king who faithfully keeps the terms of the covenant

The Suzerain King



A covenant of works

The Vassal King



A covenant of grace

The People

**It is works for the vassal so that it might be grace for the people that he represents
This is the overriding point of the 4 gospels for Jesus is offering salvation for all who
will believe in Him**

Only those who believe does Jesus bring into the kingdom of God
The passion narrative is the key to the whole gospel, in fact you could say that the gospels are passion narratives which extended introductions

- Everything that Jesus does leading up to the passion week like healing the sick, restoring a leper, causing the blind to see, raising the dead are being given to sinners due to His impending death on the cross.
- The cross is the place where the kingship of Jesus is finally revealed in all of its glory.
- Jesus shuts up the demons because they are calling Him a Messiah and the people have the wrong category for who this Jesus is and why He has come
- He doesn't publicize this fact but he secretly reveals this fact to His disciples
- The emphasis in all 4 gospels is the kingship of Christ. What was the title that was put on the cross; Here is Jesus, King of the Jews.

The cross identifies that He is the King of Israel

The soldiers put on Him a purple garment and then a crown of thorns on His head

When Jesus goes to the cross as the obedient vassal king it is here that He obtains the blessings for those that believe in Him
Isaiah 53 the suffering servant and because of our sins that He was crucified

The suffering servant and the Messianic King go together

We can see the substitutionary obedience of Christ, who is our vassal king and our covenant head, He stands in our place before God. It is works for Christ so that it may be grace for us.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

Eph. 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Titus 3:6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

Titus 3:7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Definition; The kingdom of God has come in power when God exercises His sovereignty to bestow His holy realm, and in the OT that would be the land, whereas in the NT that will be heaven, on His holy people, in the OT that is Israel, and in the NT that is the church, through His obedient king.

The kingdom comes three times in the Bible

- **One** - in the garden of Eden, the kingdom is offered to His people on the basis of Adam's obedience
- **Two** - God bestows the land to the people through the vassal king of Joshua, in Israel what you have is the kingdom in a type and shadow (God not only offers but bestows) and we see this in the very first Chapter in Joshua when God says to him be strong and courageous, and be faithful to keep the law because if you do then God is going to bless you.
- **Third** in the end the kingdom is going to be a reality and that is in Christ

And in each case you can see the suzerain king, the vassal king and the people

In the garden of Eden - God is the suzerain, and Adam is the vassal and the people are all of his decedents

In the OT - God is the suzerain and the vassal king is Joshua, David or Solomon or any of the other kings, and the nation of Israel are the people

In the NT - God is the suzerain, Jesus is the vassal King and we are his children

Oaths or Covenants

An oath or covenant is a divinely sanctioned commitment

Divinely sanctioned doesn't mean divinely approved but it means that the covenant has sanctions in it which normally includes blessings and curses

Deuteronomy 27:11-26 and Deuteronomy 27:26 is the verse that the apostle Paul quotes in Galatians 3:10 which says

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.”

Paul is saying that if you do not render complete obedience to the Law throughout your whole life then you are under a curse

Notice in Deuteronomy 28 that the blessings are mentioned in verses 1-14 and in Leviticus 26

This is an example in the Bible of a covenant or an oath and it has these sanctions attached that if you obey there will be blessing but if you disobey there will be a curse

A key for us to understand is that every covenant in the Bible does not operate under the same principle.

Though all covenants have blessings and curses not all covenant relationships are conditioned on the human partner

There are two types of covenants in the Bible

One is a covenant of grace in which God Himself takes the sanctions

And covenants of law or works in which the sanctions are taken against the human partner

The simple way to tell the difference is to ask the question; who is taking the oath by which the covenant is taking place

The oath is recognized by the language my I be under a curse if I don't do everything stated in this covenant

Should God take the covenant on Himself then it will be a covenant of grace

Should man take the covenant on himself then it will be a covenant of works

In the covenant with Abraham who takes the oath and the answer is God Himself as we see in Genesis 15:17 as God passes through the animal halves

When you come to the covenant at Mount Sinai then you see it is a covenant of Law because it is Israel that is agreeing to do what God says.

Exodus 24:7-8

Covenants are the way in which God uses to administrate various kingdoms throughout redemptive history

The big plan is the "kingdom of God" but the tools that God uses are covenants that He uses to administrate the kingdom at various points along the way.

Another definition of covenant is an oath bound commitment
It is the very act of taking the oath that causes the sanctions to come into play

In the Bible the terms oath and covenant are synonymous and so you will see in some passages it says that God entered into a covenant with Israel and in the next verse it will say that Israel entered into an oath

Footnotes for research on Suzerain Treaties

George E. Mendenhall's ground-breaking *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955), which was followed by other studies,

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K. Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971);

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F. Charles Fensham, "The Treaty Concept and the Covenant: Recent Findings," *Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator*:

A *Festschrift* for Meredith G. Kline, ed. Howard Griffith

John R. Muether (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 43-50.