Kingdom Through Covenant (2)\(^1\):
The Kingdom of God in the New Testament

The New Covenant
Christ the Kingdom
The Kingdom in the Power of the Spirit
The Kingdom Consummated

The New Covenant

God carries out his kingdom plan through covenant in the Old and New Testament. The New Testament is thoroughly Christ-centered. Every aspect of the New Testament is closely tied to Jesus Christ (cf. Lk 24:27; Ac 13:32-33; 2Co 1:20; Heb 1:1-2). It is Christ through whom God carries out his kingdom plan in the New Testament. This is because Christ is the mediator of the new covenant. How does God administer his kingdom work through the new covenant?

The uniqueness of the biblical covenant is that God took the initiative on our behalf. God solemnly enters a covenant with creation, out of his grace. God persistently works out his redemptive work by making covenants.\(^2\) God entered a covenant by choosing a covenant representative: the covenant with Adam (Gen 1-3; Hos 6:7) in which the foundations of God’s reign were laid; God's covenant with Noah (Gen 6:18; 9:9-17) in which a stable environment for God’s redemptive work was secured after the fall; God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen 15-17) in which God made promises to him; the Mosaic covenant (Ex 19-24) in which Moses was God's covenant representative and God ruled by the law of God; the Davidic covenant (2Sa 7; Ps 89; 132) in which God made a covenant with David to establish an eternal kingdom. In the prophetic hope, God promised a new covenant where he would write his law upon people’s hearts. In all these covenants, we recognize that while people are unfaithful, God is faithful and sovereign in establishing his saving rule.

The synopsis below shows the central aspects of the biblical covenants and how they relate to God’s kingdom.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Presented at the Midwest regional staff meeting in Chicago (May 2018).
\(^2\) P. J. Gentry & S. J. Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant; S. Vibert, “Kingdom and Covenant in the New Testament.”
\(^3\) Cf. This synopsis is a summary of kingdom and covenant based on G. Goldsworthy, Gospel and Kingdom and S. Vilbert, “Kingdom and Covenant in the New Testament.”
The New Covenant
(Jer 31:31-34; Lk 22:20) | Messiah | Fulfillment | The Kingdom in Jesus Christ
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In the new covenant, God administers his kingdom specifically through Christ. Jesus the Messiah is the new covenant representative. “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:15). Jesus Christ is God Incarnate who restores the true relationship between himself and humans. Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God (cf. the deity of Jesus: Jn 1:1-3; Php 2:5-7; Col 1:16-17; 2:9; Tit 2:13; Heb 1:8; Rev 22:13). To express this in a covenantal language: Jesus is both the covenant God for humans and the covenant man before God. God takes his covenant seriously and keeps it by his infinite sacrifices. Jesus said in Lk 22:20, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (cf. 1Co 11:25). To fulfill the promise of the new covenant, God incarnate sacrificed his precious life. The sacrifice of the blood of animals was central to the Old Testament sacrificial system; it looked to the future fulfillment in Christ. To bring the blessings of the new covenant to us, the blood of Christ was sacrificed, “who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God” (Heb 9:14).

The new covenant is the covenant of fulfillment because it comes at the end of God's history as fulfillment of all his purposes. It is certainly not a plan B to replace the failed plan A. No. God’s purposes are consistent. The word “new” in the new covenant (Jer 31:31) does not mean that it is disconnected from earlier covenants in the Bible. The Hebrew word for “new” is chaddash (Cf. Isa 61:4; Eze 36:26; Job 29:20; the Greek term for the new covenant “kaine diatheke”). While the new covenant is contrasted with the old, it does not mean “completely new,” but “renewed” or “renovated.” In Heb 8-9, the old became obsolete, because the new covenant fulfilled perfectly what the old only foreshadowed. So, the new covenant is a covenant that fulfills God’s kingdom purposes in the covenants through Christ. The new covenant brings God's kingdom to its final goal.

**Christ the Kingdom**

As the mediator of the new covenant, Jesus has fulfilled the promises and types of the Old Testament (e.g. the sacrificial system). In his life, death and resurrection, Jesus inaugurated the kingdom. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and demonstrated it. He reveals that God is truly fatherly and caring for us (Mt 6:9-10). He brings God's saving reign to this world. The kingdom of God is directly connected with the person of Christ (cf. Mt 19:27; Mk 10:29; Ac 8:12; 28:31). As the early Church Fathers said, Christ himself is the Kingdom in person (autobasileia). Now, let’s consider this in three aspects.

As seen in part 1 of my presentation, it is helpful to define the kingdom as “God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule.” Now, the New Testament teaches that each of these aspects of the kingdom has been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. He is “the true people of God, the true kingly sphere, and the true rule of God.”

**The People of the Kingdom**

Jesus is the true man of the covenant. While Jesus Christ is God the Creator, he is also truly man, the last Adam, the son of Abraham, and the son of David (Mt 21:9; Lk 4:16-24; Ro 1:3; 5:19; 1Co 15:22,45; Col 3:16; Col 1:15).

Adam failed to live in a right relationship with God. Christ the last Adam comes, and by overcoming temptation, he brings his new people into perfect fellowship with God. Israel failed the test as people of

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4 See G. Goldsworthy, Kingdom; cf. V. Roberts, God’ Big Picture.
5 G. Goldsworthy, Kingdom, 121. This section primarily refers to Goldsworthy, Gospel and Kingdom, chapter 9 and According to Plan, 202ff.
6 Ibid., 202.
God. But in baptism, Jesus identified with fallen mankind and received divine approval as the true Son of God (cf. Lk 3:23-38). As the true Son of God, he lived a perfect life, obeying God in every aspect, even to the point of death on the cross (Php 2:8). As a representative of new humanity, in whose heart the law of God is written, Christ established the new covenant, bringing the blessings of Abraham to all of us.

The Place of the Kingdom

Christ is the true kingly sphere for God’s people. The Garden of Eden was the perfect environment of God’s first creation. After the fall, people lost that environment. Now salvation means that God’s people would be restored into the sphere where they can live in a restored relationship with God. In the Old Testament, the Promised Land (the land flowing with milk and honey) was the center of God’s place. The temple was the focal point of the Promised Land. Solomon’s temple foreshadowed a fulfilment of the promises to David regarding the rule of David’s son (2Sa 7). Yet, because Israel broke the covenant with their God, they were driven out from the Promised Land and the temple was destroyed. In Ezekiel, the new temple was promised as a sign of God’s ruling and life-giving presence in the kingdom (Eze 47:1-12). In Zechariah, a new temple would be built by David’s descendant Zerubbabel through the Spirit (Zec 4:6).

All these images of locality revealed in redemptive history (garden, land, city, temple) see their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. In the Gospel, the place of the kingdom for God’s people is Jesus Christ himself. John testifies that Jesus Christ is the tabernacle of God in human flesh who dwells among us (Jn 1:14). Jesus is the true temple where we meet God (Jn 2:13-22). Hebrews is thoroughly saturated with this theme of Jesus the true temple: Christ sacrificed himself by shedding his precious blood (Heb 7-10). By his sacrificial death and the indestructible power of his resurrection, Christ is the perfect temple, the perfect sacrifice, and the perfect high priest. Jesus Christ is the new temple and the new creation. He embodies the renewal of all things in himself where his covenant people dwell and can enjoy the heavenly blessings of fellowship with God. 7

The temple is fulfilled in the presence of Christ through the Spirit (Eph 2:18-22; 1Co 3:16; 2Co 6:16). This will be fully realized at the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev 21-22).

The Rule of the Kingdom (Christ is God’s rule)

In the New Testament, God rules over his people through the new covenant. The gospel is the fulfilment of the hope of the new covenant (cf. Lk 1:46-55; 1:68-79; 2:29-32), which is established in Jesus’ blood (Lk 22; 1Co 11:25; cf. Ex 24:8).

Christ is the Messianic King who rules. He fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament. He fulfills the role of Moses and David. As a mediator of the covenant, David was a shadow of the messianic king (2Sa 7; cf. Dt 17: 14-20). Jesus is the Son of David, ruling in God’s kingdom forever (Lk 1:32-33). His kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36). His rule is a serving, sacrificial and saving rule (Mt 11:29; Mk 10:45). The risen Jesus is Lord and Messiah (Ac 2: 36). He has “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18; cf. Dan 7:14). Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has inaugurated the kingdom and brought God’s saving rule into this world. He now rules as king whose rule is manifested through the church (cf. Eph 1:22-23).

In short, Jesus is the Kingdom in person. In Christ, there is a restoration of relationships between God, man and the world. Wherever Christ rules there is the kingdom.

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7 Goldsworthy, Plan, 207.
See the diagram of Christ the Kingdom. All critical aspects of the kingdom converge on Jesus Christ.

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**The Kingdom in the Power of the Holy Spirit**

**The Gift of the Holy Spirit**

The kingdom of God has become reality in the person of Jesus Christ. Now, how does this realized kingdom in Jesus relate to us? This question is about how the kingdom advances in our time. After his resurrection and ascension, the risen Christ sent the promised gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon his church, his new covenant people. Though the Holy Spirit was always present in the work of salvation throughout history, for the first time, the Spirit was given in relation to Christ’s finished work (Ac 1-2). The coming of the Holy Spirit means the coming of Jesus himself in the Spirit. Jesus Christ is the focal point of the Spirit’s new covenant ministry. By the coming of the Spirit, the future has broken into the present. Through the Spirit, the powers and blessings of the kingdom are already available to us. Whoever hears the gospel and believes in Jesus, receives forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:21,38).

**The Community of the New Covenant**

By the outpouring of the Spirit, the community of the new covenant has been born. The church is not made by human plans but created by God. The church is not merely a human organization, but the community of God’s people. We are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special

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8 Cf. Goldsworthy, *Kingdom*, 121 (modified by me).
possession” (1Pe 2:9). This amazing identity of believers comes from the grace of God in Jesus Christ. How? It is possible by our union with Christ.

Christ, who is the mediator of the new covenant, unites believers to himself in the power of the Holy Spirit so that what is his becomes ours. The phrase “in Christ” or “with Christ” in the New Testament expresses the “Old Testament idea of the representative mediator of salvation.” Through faith, we are united with Jesus Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit. By the work of the Spirit, the grace of Christ is applied to us so that our debts become his and his riches become ours. We have died with Christ and have been buried with him (Ro 6:3-11; Gal 2:19-20; Col 2:12,20), raised with him (Ro 6:4-5,11; 1Co 15:22; Eph 2:5), and seated in the heavenly realm (Eph 2:6). In Christ, we are a new creation (2Co 5:17). So, the union with Christ characterizes the life of the new covenant people. By the work of the Spirit, the church is united with Christ, in whom the power of the Kingdom is already real and tangible.

The Church, the Agent of the Kingdom

In understanding the church, we need a thoroughly kingdom-based vision. How do the church and the kingdom relate to each other? The kingdom is much bigger and broader than the church. While the kingdom is “the rule of God and the sphere in which his rule is experienced, the church is “the people of the kingdom—those who have received the kingdom of God.” The church arises from the proclamation of God’s kingdom. “It is the action of God’s kingdom … which creates the church.” The church comes into being when the kingdom message is proclaimed, and people respond to that message. Therefore, the church is the creation of the kingdom produced by the obedient response to God’s reign.

While the church is not God’s kingdom itself, neither is it his plan B. God planned for the church to be the “key agent of his Kingdom” (Eph 3:10). The church is the eschatological community of the king on earth. It is the messianic community that has started to follow the principles of God’s future kingdom on earth. What was the early church primarily concerned with in the book of Acts? They praised God, proclaimed the kingdom and loved each other in the Christian community. They did so in the power of the Spirit. The church’s mission is to witness to the kingdom of God by continuing in the works of the kingdom that Jesus began (Mt 24:14; Lk 10:9). The church today is the main agent of God’s kingdom, taking the good news of Christ into all the world by the power of the Spirit (Ac 1:8). The church proclaims the gospel of the kingdom to all the nations (Mt 28:19-20; Lk 24:47). As the community of the messianic king, the church is to reveal and proclaim the true nature of the kingdom and to hasten its coming in words and deeds (2Pe 3:12). The gospel of the kingdom is intrinsically social. The church is a reconciled people concerned about compassion, righteousness, and justice. We are the King’s ambassadors, imploring to “be reconciled to God” in all relationships, even in earthly social institutions such as the family, the workplace, and the government (cf. 2Co 5:20). So, the church is a sign and foretaste of the kingdom that God will one day give to his creation.

The Kingdom: Now and Not Yet

The kingdom of God is both present and future. God’s reign is present. This is related to Christ’s first coming. The kingdom is present in the person and ministry of Christ (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20). Through his

9 Goldsworthy, Plan, 221.
11 G. Ladd, “Kingdom of God,” in BEB.
12 H. Snyder, The Community of the King, 13.
14 S. Grenz, Theology for the Community of God, 477f.
15 See G. Vos; O. Cullmann; J. Moltmann; A. Hoekema; G. Ladd.
death, resurrection and exaltation, Jesus has been installed as Lord of the universe. The church can already experience the powers and blessings of the Spirit. We are called to enter the kingdom by faith.

However, the kingdom of God is still coming (See Mt 7:21-23; Mt 13; 25; 1Co 4; Ro 14:17; 2Ti 4:18; 1Co 6:9; Gal 5:21; 1Co 15:50). The kingdom is present now only in an incomplete state. The kingdom in its full manifestation is an object of faith, not of sight. When the kingdom comes in its fullness at the Second coming of Christ, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father (Php 2:11).

We see a certain tension between these two aspects. The church is caught up in the tension between the present age and the age to come. The believer already experiences the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but he still awaits his resurrection body. Therefore, “the church can never be at rest … but must always be the church in struggle and conflict, often persecuted, but sure of the ultimate victory.” 16 “We thank God for having brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, and yet we continue to pray, ‘Thy kingdom come.’” 17

(Diagram: The New Testament eschatological view: already – not yet) 18

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**The Kingdom Consummated**

**The New Heaven and New Earth**

After the fall, the creation was subjected to frustration, and while “groaning,” it awaits to be “liberated from its bondage to decay” (Ro 8:21). We are waiting with longing for the final redemption, the resurrection of our bodies (Ro 8:23). “We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” (2Pe 3:13). Look at the stunning description of the kingdom in Rev 21-22. The new heaven and new earth is the complete fulfillment of God’s plan that the whole history awaits (Rev 21:1). This is the specific fulfillment of the prophecy (Is. 65:13,17). Any hint of injustice and sins of this age will be completely removed and gone. Death will be forever swallowed up in victory (1Co 15:54). God is “making all things new” (Rev 21:5). The renewal of the whole creation is now complete. Then, God will be all in all (1Co 15:28).

**The Consummation of the Covenant**

In Rev 21, the images of the bride and the tabernacle describe the intimate covenantal relationship between God and his people. God’s redeemed people are prepared like “a bride beautifully dressed for her

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16 G. Ladd, Presence, 338.
17 Hoekema, 52.
18 Based on Fee/Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.
husband” (21:2; cf. 21:9). Rev 21:3-4 read, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” All that the tabernacle and temple pointed to will become a reality: God’s dwelling among the people! God with us! This is the consummation of God’s purpose in the covenant throughout history: perfect relationship of love, trust, and righteousness. There is no need for the temple because God himself is present and is the source of all light (Rev 21:22-23). From the throne of God and the Lamb, the river of life flows (Rev 22:1-5; cf. Eze 47:1-12). Then, our deepest heart longings will be fully fulfilled and all questions we have fully answered. We’ll see him face to face and enjoy his presence forever (Rev 22:4). This beatific vision is far beyond our description or imagination.

Concluding Remarks

After seeing the vision of the ultimate realization of God’s kingdom plan, do you feel excitement and longing for God’s kingdom? How amazing it would be to see all broken relationships completely healed. How amazing it would be to be surrounded by God’s presence. But we still live between the times of already and not yet. While living in this age, we struggle with various issues in different areas of our lives. Though we have received the kingdom by grace, we are still vulnerable, fragile and flawed. If we are focused on our life problems, our perspective becomes bleak and short-sighted. But when we have the vision of God’s kingdom, we can see everything from a kingdom perspective. Right now, the kingdom is breaking into this world. The power of the kingdom is already available, healing our broken hearts and broken relationships in our family, ministry, workplace and society. So, we are called to “seek first his kingdom and righteousness” (Mt 6:33) and live out God’s kingdom in our everyday lives. The more our minds are captivated by the majesty and beauty of the King, the more our lives will be transformed to live as kingdom people.

In our journey toward the kingdom, we may limp and stumble daily. But our confidence is not in our faithfulness, but in God’s covenantal love that never fails. In our fragileness, we rely on our Lord who laid down his life for us out of his covenantal faithfulness. His faithful love empowers us to reject our idolatry and self-centeredness and to testify about the kingdom through our words and deeds. God is faithful in keeping his promise of the kingdom. The Lord says, “Yes, I’m coming soon.” So, we can answer him with assurance, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).

(Diagram: The Coming of the Kingdom of God)
(The Final Perfection of the New Creation)

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