

Views from the Pews: The Kingdom of God 1

During the weeks leading up to the Feast of Christ the King we are going to be exploring ways in which we might understand the “Kingdom of God” that Jesus taught so much about. Today we think about how the Kingdom of God might be understood in terms of the history of the idea.

Given that the Kingdom of God was central to Jesus’ teaching, it would be easy to regard it as an understanding of God’s sovereignty that originated with Him. However, the concept of God’s kingdom as present among his people came much earlier and, although the actual phrase “Kingdom of God” was not used until the writing of the apocryphal book, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, God’s Kingdom was referred to frequently, and in different ways throughout the OT.

Perhaps one of the best-known examples is found in 1 Samuel 8 where the people approach Samuel and ask him to appoint a king to rule them. Samuel is angered by what he sees as their rejection of his leadership. However, God tells him not to take it personally. “It is not you they have rejected.” says God, “but me from being King over them.” The idea of God’s kingship likely goes back to the era when people saw their deity(s) as ruling over definable territories. In the earlier OT writings, there are mentions of the gods of various places and altars to those gods placed appropriately where people might make offerings and worship. This seems to have morphed over time until the gods were associated with particular peoples and nations.

Israel’s understanding that Yahweh was omnipresent, not limited to a particular physical location, developed over time. The Abrahamic saga and the stories of Moses and the Exodus, which pointed to the reach of God as present and effective among his people, even in Egypt, contributed to this development. But the Exile was the most potent event in the process towards understanding God as omnipresent. In 597BC Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians, and Judah’s most influential citizens were taken captive and forcibly relocated to Babylon. That they arrived bereft - certain their God had deserted them, is reflected in Psalm 137. Yet not too far into the exile, they were already aware that God could still hear them and had not abandoned them. And finally, on the return from Babylon their rescue was theologically connected to the exodus, and the sovereignty of God as their God firmly established.