

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Week 5 - Day 4: What About the Writings?

At first glance, the Bible's collection of writings seem to deviate from the chronological story of Israel. In fact, you may have come across the Psalms, the wisdom literature, and some of the other writings in devotionals and thought of them as separate from God's kingdom narrative. The writings, however, play an important role in the kingdom story by reminding Israel— currently in the Babylonian exile – of the hope of a restored kingdom and the mind-blowing reality that God has not given up working through His family even though they have drifted further and further away from Him.

Throughout many of the Psalms, we are able to explore king David's heart. Some of the Psalms wrestle with David's reaction to his own sin and the enemies surrounding him:

Psalm 51:1-2 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

However, many of David's Psalms long for the *blessed kingdom life* under God's rule:

Psalm 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Psalm 2:10-12 Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The kingdom life is one where God leads His people and the enemy kingdom is destroyed!
What a hopeful vision of PARADISE for the Israelites that are being held captive in Babylon!

If anyone seeks the kingdom's way of *wisdom* -- turning away from sin and walking in accordance with the law of the Good Shepherd -- then one can expect blessings! Who better to affirm this particular cause-and-effect pattern than the wise King Solomon who was blessed beyond compare:

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Proverbs 16:3 Commit to the Lord whatever you do and he will establish your plans

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Do good, trust God, and God's blessing will come to His people! Seems pretty straightforward, right?

The skeptic of Ecclesiastes begs to differ. In Ecclesiastes, a teacher observes the randomness of the world and wonders if the Proverbial cause-and-effect conclusion is actually true? The skeptic in Ecclesiastes acknowledges that somebody can work hard to do everything right, and still get dealt a bad hand. It seems to be worthless anyway since in the end, we all die.

Ecclesiastes 8:14-17 There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

So how do we account for the tension between what is supposed to be the *blessed life* in God's kingdom and the suffering we all experience? At the beginning of Job, we are introduced to the heavenly council of God. This is a supernatural reality in which the Satan (*satan* is the Hebrew word for "the accuser") is allowed to question the good judgment of God and bring devastation to test Job, a blameless and upright man who is undeserving of suffering:

Job 1:8-12 And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your

hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

Job’s three friends come to him influenced by the “cause-and-effect” mindset and attribute Job’s misfortune to a hidden sin that Job has not yet confessed. In the end, Job never receives an explanation for his suffering. However, he does receive a more humble perspective on God’s authority over suffering. Additionally, Job is commended for seeking the wisdom of God above the wisdom of men (something his friends did not do).

Job 28:20-24 From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, ‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’ “God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens.

For an Israelite in the midst of exile, these writings would have acted as a reminder that even in the midst of suffering, some of which later generations in Babylon may not have been responsible for, God will rule over His kingdom people again and bring them into His kingdom land. Consider how much God loves His people through the prophet Jeremiah who writes a whole book of laments after watching the destruction of God’s kingdom land and the people’s disobedience to God’s rule:

Lamentations 1:1a How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations!

It’s as if God’s love for Israel was like a loving marriage relationship that was never meant to be torn apart! Now, the passionate marriage language of Song of Songs fits in as a reflection of the deep covenantal affection between God and His people! Consider the words of one heartbreaking scene:

Song of Songs 5:6-8 I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer. The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love.

The relationship between God and His people is like a marriage that has been on an up and down journey, but it was never meant to be broken apart like it was in exile! Even when God’s people have abandoned His ways, the Lord pursues them out of His love! Consider the book of Esther where the Jews find themselves in a foreign land threatened by a foreign king.

Esther 4:13-16 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep

silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."

Esther, which is a book that notoriously does not mention the name of God once, is full of so-called *coincidences*! Even though the family of God may not acknowledge His work, He continues to orchestrate all things for His people!

And just like the story of Esther and Mordecai, we see how God can work through anyone who would become His faithful servants, even through the worst kind of suffering. Ruth steps onto the scene as a foreign woman from Moab, Israel's historic enemy. Ruth tragically loses her husband but remains faithful to her Jewish mother-in-law as well as her God! Through amazing circumstances, Ruth and Naomi *coincidentally* stumble upon a family redeemer in Boaz. Because of her faithfulness, Ruth, a foreigner who has suffered tremendously, will forever have an important place in the story of God's kingdom. Look at the important lineage of Ruth's son...

Ruth 4:13-17 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Why does God allow for His people to suffer? Is there still hope for God's people in exile? The Hebrew collection of writings suggest God's people can rest in the fact that God is sovereign over all things and He is faithfully pursuing His lost people. All of these writings are a call to fear Yahweh as our king instead of the chaotic circumstances caused by sin! Our path forward is to align our ways with God's rule with the utmost reverence and respect for His supreme authority and a terror for a much worse exile if we choose to continue in our sin:

Job 28:28 Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

The good news is that even though we are all marked by sin, our King loves us DEEPLY and even uses the rebellion of His people to bring about His good and glorious will throughout the rest of history! The writings gave Israel, and continues to give us, hope of salvation from exile, where God's rule will be established over His people once more, and where God will be with us!

Psalms 99:1-5 The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! The Lord is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he! The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the Lord our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he!

Lamentations 3:21-24 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

-AJ Vanegas

Share the Gospel: We long for the kingdom life where sin and suffering are no more! In the meantime, we can rest assured that our King rules over all things and routinely utilizes suffering to bring about His glorious purposes even while we are still sinners!

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers: