

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL



FROM THE PSALMS

“They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.”

—Psalm 145:11–12

FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.’”

—Revelation 5:9–10

FROM THE *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

“Christ stands at the heart of this gathering of men into the ‘family of God’. By his word, through signs that manifest the reign of God, and by sending out his disciples, Jesus calls all people to come together around him. But above all in the great Paschal mystery - his death on the cross and his Resurrection - he would accomplish the coming of his kingdom. ‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’ Into this union with Christ all men are called.”

.—CCC, 542

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

INTRODUCTION

After years of traveling in the wilderness, the people of Israel arrive at the Promised Land and settle into their home. God blesses them and forms them into a kingdom. God raises up a holy man named David to be their king. How does this kingdom help us understand Jesus' life? What does it tell us about the meaning of his death?

OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, open my mind to your word and bless me with the gift of understanding so I might come to know and love you better. Amen.

BACKGROUND

In our reading, King David is near the end of his life. He gives final instructions to his son, Solomon.

SCRIPTURE

Read 1 Kings 2:1–4

COMMENTARY

God's plan is to make the kingdom of Israel his special possession even calling the king to be his son (2 Samuel 7:14). He promises that the kingdom will be *everlasting*: "If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel." Normally, kingdoms of the earth come and go. God swears that David's kingdom will endure forever *if* the Israelites are faithful to the Lord.

Sadly, the kingdom of Israel is not faithful. Though King David loves God with an undivided heart, most of the kings after him allow sin to reign in their hearts. The many blessings God gives the kingdom become a source of pride. Many kings abandon the love of God altogether and lead God's people to worship the false gods of the other nations. God responds to their failures as a good Father: he urges them to repent and disciplines them when they do not.

FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

The Gospel of Matthew introduces Jesus as the "son of David." Jesus is the rightful heir of the kingdom of Israel.

Jesus' reign is one of service and humility. As their king, Jesus corrects the failings of his people, re-living significant events in their history and correcting their faults.

Like Israel, Jesus travels to Egypt, suffers in the wilderness, and enters the Promised Land. Whereas Israel succumbs to desires for good food, treasure, and power, Jesus remains faithful to God in the face of the same temptations. Israel fails to act as God's beloved son; Jesus loves God perfectly.

Jesus proclaims the true meaning of the kingdom—a meaning the people of Israel collectively misunderstood. God's kingdom is one of humility and poverty, ordered to the love of God and neighbor. Christ equates "his glory" with his crucifixion. He enters into his kingdom bloodied and humbled, wearing a crown of thorns. The King of Kings reigns by being a servant to all.

IN THE LITURGY

At baptism, we are anointed priest, prophet, and *king*. We share in Christ's kingship. By the grace we receive in the sacrament, we are given the power to reign as Christ reigns: through humility and service.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help me practice humility and self-control. Give me the faith to know that you revealed your power most perfectly when you gave your life on the Cross. Amen.

RESOLUTION

We exercise our share in Christ's kingship through self-control. We can learn self-control by fasting from pleasant foods and physical comfort. What will your fast be today?

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TEMPLE



FROM THE PSALMS

“Blessed is the one you
choose and bring near, to
dwell in your courts! We
shall be satisfied with the
goodness of your house, the
holiness of your temple!”

—Psalm 65:4

FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

“And I saw no temple in the
city, for its temple is the Lord
God the Almighty and the
Lamb.”

—Revelation 21:22

FROM THE *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

“Christ is the true temple of
God, ‘the place where his
glory dwells’; by the grace of
God, Christians also become
the temples of the Holy
Spirit, living stones out of
which the Church is built.”

—CCC, 1197

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TEMPLE

INTRODUCTION

In the book of Exodus, God instructs Moses to construct the Tent of Meeting—a portable worship place to pray and offer sacrifice. After the Israelites settle into the Promised Land, they build a permanent place of worship: the Temple. Today we will learn how this holy building prepares us for Christ’s coming as well as his death.

OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, open my mind to your word and bless me with the gift of understanding so I might come to know and love you better. Amen.

BACKGROUND

David’s son Solomon builds a magnificent temple where the people of his kingdom can worship the Lord. It is a source joy and a sign of God’s favor. Remember, though, that God’s favor is dependent on the Israelites’ behavior. God rewards their goodness and obedience with victory over their enemies. On the other hand, he responds to their sinfulness with clear and direct action: God gives their enemies victory over them. Sin always leads to their sadness. Today’s passage describes God’s firm but loving response to their unrepentant behavior.

SCRIPTURE

Read Jeremiah 52:1–3, 12–13⁴

COMMENTARY

It was unthinkable to the Israelites that God would allow the Temple to be destroyed. They believed, no matter how gravely they sinned, that God would always protect his holy Temple. This led to a type of presumption: we do not really have to obey God’s warnings, because he will never let harm come to his holy house.

Prior to permitting Israel’s enemies to tear down the Temple, God issues many warnings through his prophets: Repent! Turn away from sin! Jeremiah 7:12–14 can even be paraphrased as, “Don’t think I won’t allow my Temple to be destroyed!” His people do not heed these warnings and the Temple is destroyed—a

dramatic sign that their sin has separated them from God.

The punishment is effective. The Israelites repent and God allows them to rebuild a second Temple.

FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

Jesus is the true Temple, where God dwells *in the flesh*. The destruction of the Old Testament Temple prefigures what will happen to Christ. Jesus himself goes to the Temple in Jerusalem, drives out the money-changers and announces that he has the authority to do this because his body is the true Temple: “‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’” But he was speaking about the temple of his body” (John 2:19–21).

The Old Testament Temple was destroyed because of sin. It took many years to rebuild it and even then, it was a shadow of its former glory. Jesus’ body, the true Temple, is likewise destroyed on account of sin. However, he will raise it up in three days in his resurrection. His resurrected body will be even more glorious than his mortal body.

IN THE LITURGY

Christ makes us into “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5) of the glorified Temple of his body. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us in the sacraments, *we* become God’s dwelling place. At the Resurrection at the end of time, Christ will bring our bodies back to life, filling them with his glory.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you have given me your Holy Spirit and made me your dwelling place. Make me always aware of your presence in me. Amen.

RESOLUTION

Take care of your body for it is God’s Temple. Take extra time to keep your clothes and hair clean and tidy to help you remember your dignity as God’s dwelling place.

⁴ The full passage of Jeremiah 52:1–13 may not be suitable for younger children as it describes violence against the Davidic king and his sons.

THE KINGDOM IS SCATTERED



FROM THE PSALMS

“You have made us like sheep for slaughter and have scattered us among the nations.

You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them.

You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us.”

—Psalm 44:11–13

FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

“So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’”

—Acts 1:6–8

FROM THE *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

“The most intimate cooperation of the Holy Spirit and the Church is achieved in the liturgy. The Spirit who is the Spirit of communion, abides indefectibly in the Church. For this reason the Church is the great sacrament of divine communion which gathers God's scattered children together.

Communion with the Holy Trinity and fraternal communion are inseparably the fruit of the Spirit in the liturgy.

—CCC, 1108

THE KINGDOM IS SCATTERED

INTRODUCTION

The loss of the Temple is not the only consequence of Israel's sin. God allows foreign nations to conquer the Israelites and carry them away from the Promised Land. It is a reverse Exodus story—instead of God gathering his people as one to go to the Promised Land, the foreign nations scatter God's people and carry them away from each other. Today, we will see how Jesus' death and resurrection restores hope for the kingdom.

OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, open my mind to your word and bless me with the gift of understanding so I might come to know and love you better. Amen.

BACKGROUND

Our scripture passage today comes from the prophet Ezekiel. It is helpful to understand a little about prophets so we know how to make sense of his words. God speaks to his people through the prophets—sometimes he speaks to them in direct warnings, other times in dramatic and symbolic images. Often, he urges them to repent of their sins so they can be holy and happy. The prophets warn that God will punish his people so as to motivate them to turn from their dangerous behavior. Finally, prophets bring words of hope that God is a loving Father. God will discipline his children, but he will also forgive and restore them when they ask him for mercy.

SCRIPTURE

Ezekiel 37:1–11

COMMENTARY

Ezekiel sees a startling vision of a valley of dry bones. These bones symbolize the “whole house of Israel.” Israel's disobedience has led to the spiritual death of its people.

While they were a kingdom under David and Solomon, Israel was united and thriving. Other nations even came to worship the God of Israel because of the glory of the kingdom. This happy situation does not endure as Israel falls into bondage to their sin. When God withdraws his help, the kingdom of Israel falls prey to its

enemies. The people are carried away from the Promised Land as captives and slaves. They are scattered among the foreign nations and cut off from communion with each other and—worst of all—from their union with God in the Temple.

Ezekiel describes Israel as a valley of dead bodies. Once full of God's spirit and thriving, God's people are “dried up” and “cut off.”

FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

Jesus takes on the consequences of Israel's failures and heals them. Israel has become a valley of dry bones. Christ, by his death and resurrection, shows that God can bring the dead to life.

Whereas God's people have become scattered, Jesus offers his life in order to *gather*. He explains, “‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die” (John 12:32).

On the Cross, Jesus pours out his Spirit upon the world. His Spirit brings all who are dead to sin back to life, gathering all people to himself.

IN THE LITURGY

Jesus restores our life by giving us his Spirit in the sacraments. The apostles and their successors are sent to all nations to bring all people—including the scattered kingdom of Israel—together in Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, even when it seems all hope is lost, you bring life. I believe that you can restore all things to life. When I sin and cut myself off from you, remind me that your Holy Spirit can heal me. Let me never forget your mercy. Amen.

RESOLUTION

Fighting with friends and family weakens our bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood. Look for a way to be a peacemaker today. Be the first one to make a sacrifice so there can be unity with your family or with your friends.