

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Martin J. Selman

I. Introduction

While there seems little doubt that the kingdom of God is the central tenet of Jesus' teaching,¹ in the Old Testament the role of the kingdom is much more problematic. For many scholars it remains a marginal element in Old Testament thought,² though others regard it as a major concept, found in a wide range of Old Testament authors and contexts. A further complication is that even those who are convinced of its importance are not agreed about its significance. It has been seen as a major sacramental experience of the Israelite cultus, or alternatively as a distinctive historical element of Israel's faith whose origins can be traced to the 'kingly covenant' of Sinai.³

Understandably, it has had a large place in some Old Testament theologies, though mainly those of a former generation. Even for Eichrodt, the centrality he attached to the notion of covenant did not obscure the significance of the kingdom of God. Indeed, Old Testament covenant was for him almost the equivalent of the New Testament kingdom of God.⁴ The major failing of these larger enterprises, however, is that they are only loosely based on the actual occurrences of the terms, 'king, kingdom, kingship' in the Old Testament. Although John Bright, for example, rightly wished to avoid artificially transposing New Testament ideas of the kingdom of God into the Old Testament, his understanding of the term

¹ E.g. G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids Mich./Exeter, 1986) x; B. Chilton (ed.), *The Kingdom of God* (London/Philadelphia 1984) 1.

² E.g. Von Rad, *TDNT* I 570; A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften* I (Munich 1953) 345, 348.

³ J. Gray, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God* (Edinburgh 1979); M. Buber, *Kingship of God* (London 1967; ET of 3rd Ger. edn. 1956; 1st edn. 1932).

⁴ W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* I (ET, London 1961) 40, 67, etc.

still 'involves the whole notion of the rule of God'.⁵ A more promising recent attempt to provide securer textual support for this approach, however, has concluded that references to Yahweh's kingship 'come from all segments of the canon and from all eras of Israel's history'. The kingdom of God may therefore be regarded as a comprehensive Old Testament scheme, and the teaching of Jesus as a genuine and natural development of it.⁶

For all its attractiveness, however, this approach has not proved widely convincing. Several reasons may be advanced for this. First, the phrase 'kingdom of Yahweh' occurs in various forms only fifteen times, while 'kingdom of God' does not appear at all.⁷ Secondly, it is usually tacitly assumed that there is no real distinction between statements that Yahweh is King and that he has a kingdom. As a result, little attention has been given to those passages which contain specific mention of Yahweh's kingdom. This failure to reckon with a separate concept is particularly evident in the case of the Psalms, where discussion has tended to be limited to the cultic implications of the so-called 'Enthronement Psalms'.⁸ Thirdly, Yahweh's kingdom is frequently thought not to have constituted an original element in Israelite faith. In the light of the widespread notion of kingly deity in the ancient Semitic world, many believe that it was mediated to Israel primarily through Canaanite influence.⁹

Closer examination, however, reveals that this small group of texts concerning the kingdom of God does represent an important and distinct aspect of the more general notion of Yahweh's kingship. The relevant passages will first be ex-

⁵ J. Bright, *The Kingdom of God in Bible and Church* (London 1955) 18.

⁶ D. Patrick, 'The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament', in W. Willis (ed.), *The Kingdom of God in 20th-century Interpretation* (Hendrickson Peabody Mass. 1987) 67-79.

⁷ Pss. 22:9; 103:19; 145:11-13; Obad. 21; Dan. 2:44; 3:33 (EVV 4:3); 4:31; 6:27 (EVV v. 26); 7:14,18,27; 1 Chr. 17:14; 28:5; 29:11; 2 Chr. 13:8.

⁸ E.g. Gray, *Reign of God*; E. Lipinski, *La royauté de Yahwe dans la poesie et le culte de l'ancien Israël* (Brussels 1965).

⁹ E.g. Alt, 'Gedanken über das Königtum Jahwes', *Kleine Schriften I* 345-57; W.H. Schmidt, *Königtum Gottes in Ugarit and Israel* (BZAW 80, Berlin 1961); Gray, *Reign of God*.

amined in some detail, before proceeding to comment on the origin, development, and wider significance of the kingdom of God in Old Testament thought. One of the most striking features of the explicit references to Yahweh's kingdom is that, apart from one mention in the prophetic literature (Obad. 21), they are restricted to three books, namely, Chronicles, the Psalms, and Daniel (the Heb. terms involved include *malkut*, *mamlaka*, and *m^eluka*, as well as Aram. *malku*).¹⁰

II. The Kingdom of God in Chronicles

Since it is impossible within the limits of this paper to attempt a thorough exegesis of every verse associated with the kingdom of Yahweh, attention will be focussed on the Chronicler's work. This choice is made partly because the results of such exegesis are particularly fruitful, and partly to demonstrate that the Chronicler's theology is more mainstream than marginal.

When David gathered Israel's assembly in preparation for Solomon's anointing, he said, 'Out of all my sons, for Yahweh has given me many sons, he has chosen Solomon my son *to sit on the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh over Israel*' (1 Chr. 28:5). Two features are immediately noteworthy. First, the unusual phrase, 'throne of the kingdom', indicating that the term 'throne' is a fixed symbol of a kingdom, and secondly, that God's kingdom is 'over Israel'. In other words, the human kingdom of Israel currently ruled by the ailing warrior David and the inexperienced youth Solomon was in some mysterious way closely bound up with the kingdom of God.

The next passage is 2 Chronicles 13:8, which contains the only example in the Old Testament of the simple phrase, 'kingdom of Yahweh'. Abijah, king of Judah and grandson of Solomon, addresses the army of the northern kingdom under Jeroboam I as they are mobilised to attack their southern neighbours, 'Now you plan to show your strength against *the kingdom of Yahweh which is in the hands of David's descendants*'. Leaving aside the different ideologies of kingship in Judah and Israel, the aspect that stands out most clearly in this passage is the association of the kingdom of God

¹⁰ See n.7.

with Abijah. According to the books of Kings, Abijah 'committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to Yahweh his God, as the heart of his predecessor David had been' (1 K. 15:3). Despite the Chronicler's much more positive presentation of Abijah, and the fact that Abijah claims only that Yahweh's kingdom is in the hands of his family rather than under his personal control, a problem remains as to how God could entrust his kingdom to such an obvious sinner.

A different kind of problem emerges from the next passage, 1 Chronicles 17:14. God's concluding promise through Nathan to David says, 'I will establish him in my house and my kingdom for ever, and his throne will be established for ever'. Despite the wording in the equivalent phrase of 2 Samuel 7:16 which says, referring to David, 'your house and your kingdom', and the fact that the difference between the possessive suffixes is just a single letter—a *yodh* replacing a *kaph*—the Chronicler's reading is to be preferred.¹¹ That the change is unlikely to be accidental is supported by the Chronicler's repeated interest in the divine kingdom. Three comments may be made about the nature of that kingdom here. First, the close relationship between the Davidic dynasty and the kingdom of God is again evident. Secondly, the juxtaposition of 'my kingdom' and 'his throne' confirms by divine decree that both kingdoms are to be permanent. But it is the third feature that is most marked here, that the relationship between the two kingdoms is closely associated with the future temple. Or to put it another way, the kingdom of God is reflected in both 'houses' of the Davidic covenant, the Davidic dynasty and the Solomonic temple.

That God's kingdom could be represented by his throne (cf. 1 Chr. 28:5) enables the inclusion of two further passages whose content confirms that they are concerned with the same idea. The first contains this statement, 'Solomon *sat on the throne of Yahweh as king* in place of his father David' (1 Chr. 29:23), while in the second, the Queen of Sheba testifies about Solomon, 'Yahweh, who in his good pleasure towards you has

¹¹ So also W. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* (HAT, Tübingen 1955) 135; H.G.M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCB, London 1982) 136; etc.

appointed you as king on his throne' (2 Chr. 9:8). Both passages clearly speak of a divine kingdom, and together with 1 Chronicles 28:5, allow the conclusion that the phrase 'throne of Yahweh' is effectively equivalent to 'kingdom of Yahweh'.

A second group of references, while not referring directly to the kingdom/throne of Yahweh, are none the less closely related to those already discussed. First, there is 1 Chronicles 29:11-12: 'Everything in heaven and earth is yours. *Yours, O Yahweh, is the kingdom*; you are lifted up over everything as head, ...you are the ruler of all things'. The opening section of David's prayer (vv. 10-13) contains several echoes from Psalm 145, and it may well be that the mention of Yahweh's kingdom there has inspired the words found here. Here, however, another dimension is introduced. The hymnic manner of speech allows David to speak of a kingdom without limitation or restriction, and in one sense the simple form of expression could not be more general or unqualified. But the context of this statement of faith, as in the case of 1 Chronicles 17:14 and 1 Chronicles 28:5, is again the temple. As the funds for the planned temple pour in, so praise for God's kingdom comes to the lips of the earthly king.

Similar issues emerge from an examination of 1 Chronicles 16:31, which this time is a direct quotation from the Psalter, 'Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let them say among the nations, "*Yahweh is king*"' (cf. Ps. 96:10). Again, Yahweh's kingly rule is expressed in the widest possible terms, including heaven, earth, and the nations, but as in 1 Chronicles 29, it is also associated with Israel's worship. In this case, however, it is the ark rather than the temple that inspires praise of God's kingship, as the ark is restored to its rightful home at the centre of God's people. A third reference occurs in Jehoshaphat's prayer in 2 Chronicles 20:6. The prayer begins on a note of praise: 'O Yahweh, are you not God in heaven, *ruling over all the kingdoms of the earth?*' Although Jehoshaphat speaks of 'rule' rather than 'kingship', both the content and context of his statement are very similar to those in the two previous passages. The extent of God's rule is again envisaged as universal and the temple forms the physical environment in which the prayer is offered. All three passages, therefore, speak of Yahweh's universal rule and

kingship, each time in the context of the major symbols of Israel's cultic life. It must also be mentioned that in each case, God demonstrated the reality of his kingly rule by fulfilling his promises. God's covenant promises to Abraham are twice mentioned directly, and even the third passage contrasts the parlous state of 'our forefathers' with the present blessings of the riches Israel has been able to contribute for the temple (1 Chr. 29:15-16; cf. v. 18).¹² God's kingdom is also therefore bound up with the patriarchal covenant as well as the Davidic.

One further group of references in Chronicles must also be brought into consideration. Though the kingdom of Yahweh is again implicit rather than explicit, all the passages deal with the exercise of God's kingly rule. A simple example may be taken from the summary of Saul's reign, '*Yahweh transferred the kingdom to David son of Jesse*' (1 Chr. 10:14). Another instance occurs in the introduction to Abijah's speech mentioned above: '*Yahweh, God of Israel, gave the kingdom to David over Israel for ever, both to him and to his descendants as a covenant of salt*' (2 Chr. 13:5). In both verses, the exact identity of the kingdom concerned is rather ambiguous. At first sight, it seems to refer to the political kingdom of Israel (or, in the latter case, to its southern section). But the fact that it is Yahweh who is said to give the kingdom to David and his descendants carries the clear implication that God is here exercising his own kingship. If God has a kingdom to give, then he too must have a kingship of his own, and one that is of a higher order than that which is here entrusted to Saul, David, or Abijah. Neither text allows us to identify the kingdom of God with the kingdom of Israel, and the Old Testament never at any point makes such a naïve equation. But nor do these passages simply make a vague claim that God exercised sovereignty over Israel. God was directly involved with this one, specific, earthly kingdom, and through it he, as well as the human king, worked out his royal purposes.

It is also striking that in both these examples and in six other related passages, it is not the united kingdom of Israel or

¹² Cf. 1 Chr. 16:14-22, especially v.16, 'the covenant he made with Abraham'; 2 Chr. 20:7, 'did you not ... give (this land) for ever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?'

the southern kingdom of Judah in general that is spoken of in this way, but only the kingdom given to David and his dynasty. An example is the promise concerning Solomon: *'I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever'* (1 Chr. 22:10). In fact, the majority of these passages are closely associated with the promise contained in the Davidic covenant, *'I will establish his kingdom'*, sometimes even repeating this promise word for word.¹³ The mention of the 'covenant of salt' (2 Chr. 13:5) further indicates that God's kingdom is to be permanently linked with the Davidic dynasty.¹⁴

It will be helpful to make some concluding observations about the Chronicler's understanding of the kingdom of God. First, although only sixteen passages in all have been adduced, and only four refer in explicit terms to the kingdom of God, it is clear that the concept of God's kingdom and kingly rule is an important one for the Chronicler. Practically all the verses occur at critical points in the Chronicler's narrative, namely, in the changeover from Saul to David (1 Chr. 10:14), at the ark's installation in Jerusalem (1 Chr. 16:31), in the Davidic covenant (1 Chr. 17:11, 14), in the preparations for the temple and David's handover to Solomon (1 Chr. 22:10; 28:5, 7; 29:11, 23, 25), at the dedication of the temple (2 Chr. 7:18), in the summary of Solomon's reign (2 Chr. 9:8), and in the Chronicler's theological explanation of the divided monarchy (2 Chr. 13:5, 8). This last chapter, according to Williamson, is of 'crucial importance', and the principles it contains 'were undoubtedly of abiding significance in the Chronicler's opinion'.¹⁵

Secondly, it is clear that the Chronicler believed that the kingdom of God was made known through the Davidic dynasty. The kingdom of Yahweh is not merely a heavenly or spiritual entity, but it is real, specific, and visible. A closer investigation of two passages makes this particularly clear. It has already been shown that according to 1 Chronicles 28:5 the kingdom of Yahweh is revealed through Yahweh's choice of Solomon. The vocabulary of election is very marked in this

¹³ See 1 Chr. 10:14; 14:2; 22:10; 28:7; 29:25; 2 Chr. 7:18; 13:5.

¹⁴ Cf. Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19.

¹⁵ Williamson, *Chronicles* 250.

passage. The verb *bahar* occurs five times in verses 4-10, and is used three times of Solomon, of his sitting on God's throne, of his status as God's adopted son, and that he is the chosen temple builder. The special significance of Solomon is confirmed by Braun's reminder that it is unparalleled to refer to the divine choice of any king after David.¹⁶ Election in the Old Testament always has a particular purpose,¹⁷ and the Chronicler makes quite clear the purpose of Solomon's election. He was to sit on the earthly throne of God's kingdom, to continue the Davidic dynasty as a mark of God's faithfulness to his promise and to build the temple. Solomon's accession was therefore a crucial moment for the kingdom of God on earth, as is indicated by the cluster of references in 1 Chronicles 28-9, for God thereby established David's dynasty and appointed the temple builder.¹⁸

The second of the two passages concerning the kingdom of God and the Davidic dynasty is 2 Chronicles 13:4-12. This potentially embarrassing section links the wicked king Abijah with the kingdom of God, in sharp contrast to the account in Kings. However, a close examination of the text reveals that what is in fact claimed is a corporate rather than an individualistic understanding. The kingdom of Yahweh is 'in the hands of David's descendants', (v. 8) so creating a distance between God's sovereign purposes and those of his kingdom's human representatives.

Further, God's kingdom is not to be identified with the failings of the Davidic line. The Chronicler's concern throughout the whole chapter is not with the king's personal moral or religious uprightness or otherwise, but with the doubtful validity of the northern kingdom and its relationship to the Davidic line in Jerusalem. The central point at issue is each nation's faithfulness to Yahweh's religious institutions, especially priesthood, Levites, and temple. Abijah is able to testify, 'As for us, Yahweh is our God and we have not forsaken him' (v. 10), and directly challenges his northern cousins, 'People of

¹⁶ R.L. Braun, *JBL* 95 (1976) 588-90; *1 Chronicles* (WBC, Waco 1986) 271.

¹⁷ H. Seebass, in G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (edd.), *TDOT* 11 (1975) 73-87, esp. 75-6.

¹⁸ 1 Chr. 28:5, 7; 29:11, 23, 25.

Israel, do not fight against Yahweh, the God of your fathers, for you will not succeed' (v. 12). Although in some ways, Abijah can have been little improvement on Jeroboam of Israel, he could justifiably claim to have been faithful to the institutional essentials of covenantal Yahwism, whereas Jeroboam had followed quite another path. A similar point is also made in the Kings account of Abijah, which speaks of Yahweh giving a 'lamp' to David 'to establish his son after him and to confirm Jerusalem' (1 K. 15:4). According to both Kings and Chronicles, therefore, God's grace shown in his commitment to the Davidic covenant was the essential component in the survival of the Davidic monarchy. The miracle is that God was able to make use of such material at all.

It is worth commenting in passing that the same point emerges from the Chronicler's account of David and Solomon, in contrast to the view of many interpreters that the Chronicler's presentation of these two kings is an uncritical hagiography. Although the Chronicler does not include the record of Solomon's marriages or of his syncretism (cf. 1 K. 11), he does preserve in detail the earlier account of the division of the monarchy, with the repeated reminder that Solomon 'laid a heavy yoke' on Israel (2 Chr. 10:4, 11, 14). David's case is even more clear-cut. Although the Bathsheba incident (2 Sam. 11-12) is only mentioned incidentally, the Chronicler replaces it with the record of a sin that is equally, if not more, heinous—that is, the matter of the census (1 Chr. 21). David's failure was not to recognise that Israel was God's people rather than his own. The details are more serious than in the case of the Bathsheba episode. For example, David's confession is more reluctant, satanic activity is more explicit, and as a result, Israel suffered the sword of Yahweh rather than the sword of the Ammonites, and David can no longer worship at the national sanctuary (against 2 Sam. 12:20). Furthermore, the nation was in urgent need of atonement, and their need was met only by a sacrifice on the site that eventually housed the temple. Even the founder of the Davidic covenant therefore was just as much a sinner as his successors, and the kingdom of Israel was equally vulnerable whether it was in the hands of David, Solomon, or Abijah. Its only really secure foundation lay in the promise of God's own kingdom.

A third general observation is that the Jerusalem temple also has clear associations with the kingdom of God. For example, Abijah's justification for his role as an heir of the kingdom promises is his faithfulness to the temple and its personnel (2 Chr. 13:8-12). Jehoshaphat expressed his confidence in Yahweh's universal rule despite the presence of foreign armies in Judah when he was in the temple (2 Chr. 20:6). David's confession, 'Yours, O Yahweh, is the kingdom' (1 Chr. 29:11), is inspired by the progress of the temple building preparations, while the similar acclamation, 'Yahweh is king' (1 Chr. 16:31), has its origin in the ark's presence in Jerusalem. What is most interesting, however, is that this association between the temple and the kingdom of God was founded in the Davidic covenant. According to that covenant, the temple would be built by David's heir and successor. Though David had intended the temple to be a monument to his own achievements, God had a higher priority. Only when God's own house was established by Solomon's accession could David's successor build the house of God. The latter house or temple was therefore a symbol of the former house or dynasty (1 Chr. 17:10-14).

These matters should not be thought of as of being of only antiquarian interest to the Chronicler. Although the Davidic monarchy had long since disappeared, the rebuilt temple was very much a present reality. His concern for the temple, its personnel and its practices was doubtless meant to encourage his contemporaries to take its worship seriously as a sign of their faith in the promises of God. By maintaining its sacrifices and not neglecting its Levites and priests, Israel might not only find continuing atonement for their sins but hope ultimately in the kingdom of God. The temple, therefore, whether Solomon's or Zerubbabel's, was not an end in itself, but a sign of something even greater than Solomon.

Finally concerning the Chronicler, it is most striking that in spite of the fact that Judah had been subject to foreign imperial domination for at least 200 years, he believed that a distinctively Israelite view of kingship should remain an essential ingredient of the nation's self-understanding. It is even more fascinating that he should hold in tension two contrasting aspects of kingship. The kingdom of Yahweh incorporated elements both human and divine, immanent and

transcendent, localised and universal. It was focussed in one particular human family, which had produced more bad kings than good ones, and for many decades had provided no kings at all. While it is inaccurate to describe the Chronicler's outlook as eschatological,¹⁹ by bringing together this specifically human dimension with that of an absolute, eternal kingdom, hopes would inevitably have been stirred of another son of David who could more faithfully represent the kingdom of God on earth.

III. The Kingdom of God in Daniel

A somewhat different view of the kingdom of God emerges from the book of Daniel. Although, as in the case of Chronicles, it is a major theme of the book, there is no association with the temple or the Davidic monarchy.²⁰ The main thrust in Daniel is the contrast between God's kingdom and all earthly kingdoms. This theme is repeated in all references to God's kingdom, whether as a eulogy in the mouth of foreign emperors,²¹ or as a kingdom given by God to men.²² Whereas the kingdoms of men are earthly in origin, the kingdom of God comes from heaven. The kingdoms of men are compared with metals that tarnish or beasts that perish, notwithstanding the glitter and strength of gold, silver, bronze, and iron or the ferocious power of the animal kingdom. The kingdom of God is indestructible, lasting for ever, in contrast with the way in which all earthly kingdoms, despite their temporary glory, must inevitably give way to a successor. Though a Nebuchadnezzar might claim to speak 'to the peoples, nations, and languages who live throughout the earth' (Dan. 3:33 MT), such sovereignty is as nothing compared with the God in whose kingdom 'all the inhabitants of the earth are regarded as nothing', and who 'does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of earth' (Dan. 4:31-2 MT). Between

¹⁹ Cf. Williamson, *TynB* 28 (1977) 115-54; for an eschatological view, cf. e.g. von Rad, *OTT I* (London, 1965) 350-1; J.D. Newsome, *JBL* 94 (1975) 208-10.

²⁰ The theme that is central to Daniel as it is to no other book in the OT is the kingdom of God', J. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC, Waco 1989) 330.

²¹ Dan. 3:33 MT (EVV 4:3); 4:31 MT (EVV 4:34); 6:27 MT (EVV 6:27).

²² Dan. 2:44; 7:14, 18, 27.

the kingdoms of men and the kingdom of God, therefore, there is ultimately conflict as well as contrast. They are set on a collision course, set in motion by human arrogance, but resulting in divine judgment.

But the opposition between the two kinds of kingdoms is not complete. Their spheres of interest overlap in two ways. First, although in one sense all human kings and kingdoms are of earthly origin (Dan. 7:2), in another sense they owe their existence to the God who 'brings down and raises up kings' (Dan. 2:21). Even, therefore, in kingdoms which do not acknowledge Yahweh as king, the kingdom of Yahweh is at work, despite the fact that in the end God will destroy all such kingdoms.

Secondly, God will give his everlasting kingdom to men. Although human kingdoms arising from the earth are doomed to failure, God does not in consequence keep his kingdom for himself and his untainted angels. Rather, he gives it both to those who have suffered from the cruelty of human authority and to those who, following Nebuchadnezzar's perhaps not whole-hearted lead, have repented of their misuse of kingly power. The kingdom of God will be given to 'the holy ones, the people of the Most High' (Dan. 7:18, 27), and to 'one like a son of man' (Dan. 7:14). This is not the place to enter into detailed discussion of the interpretation of these vexed phrases. It is sufficient to note that both expressions unequivocally indicate the recipients of God's kingdom as human. The 'holy ones' are called 'the people of the Most High' (Dan. 7:27), a phrase never used of angelic beings,²³ while 'a son of man' is at least in part a human figure, even though a divine origin is indicated by his 'coming with the clouds of heaven' and by his antecedents in Ezekiel's vision of 'the likeness of the appearance of a man' on the divine throne (Ezk. 1:26).

It is by no means self-evident that the son of man is to be understood in the same way as the holy ones, as is often

²³ Cf. A. Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (London 1979) 127; G.R. Beasley-Murray, *CBQ* 45 (1983) 44-58, especially 53. For a different view, see M. Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Essays* (Philadelphia 1967) 194-214 (ET of German original, *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 56 [1955] 146-61); J. Goldingay, *Daniel* 176-8, 181-2.

alleged.²⁴ Certainly, a corporate element in the son of man figure is implied by the vagueness of his description, the use of the phrase elsewhere in the Old Testament, and similarities in the manner in which the son of man and the holy ones receive the kingdom. If, however, the son of man is intended to be a corporate synonym for the son of man, one would expect a greater convergence. Only of the son of man is it said, for instance, that he came with the clouds of heaven, was led into the presence of the Ancient of Days, and that he, like the Most High, was worshipped (cf. Dan. 7:13-14, 27).²⁵ He seems therefore to have a higher status than the holy ones. Further, those very features which emphasize the elements of divinity are more characteristic of an individual than of a community. Even the most exalted descriptions of the people of God never describe them as coming with the clouds of heaven or receiving worship.²⁶

The description of the son of man, therefore, has a kind of double duality, in that it is individual as well as corporate, and divine as well as human. The manner in which the kingdom of God is to be given to and revealed through the son of man therefore contains a genuine element of mystery. This does not detract, however, from the clear idea that the kingdom of God will become the possession of a human individual, and in that sense, it is similar to the Chronicler's description of the kingdom in the hands of David and his descendants. The thought that God's people, the holy ones, receive his kingdom seems also to be shared with Chronicles, not only in a corporate reference to David's descendants (2 Chr. 13:8), but especially in the part played by Israel in recognising Solomon's kingship and in contributing to the temple (1 Chr. 28-9). Where Daniel differs from Chronicles is that the son of man is not linked to the Davidic covenant, and that the kingdom is clearly eschato-

²⁴ Eg. L.F. Hartman and A.A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (AB, Garden City NY 1978) 85-102; E.W. Heaton, *Daniel* (Torch, London 1956), 184; N. Porteous, *Daniel* (OTL, London 1965) 111; G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London 1973) 169.

²⁵ According to Goldingay, *Daniel* 168, the motif of being human is used in Daniel 7 to indicate a position of authority (cf. vv. 4, 8).

²⁶ Cf. A.J. Ferch, *The Son of Man in Daniel Seven* (Berrien Springs, Mich 1979) 175-80, for further details of the differences between the saints and the son of man.

logical. The kingdom given to the son of man and the holy ones of the Most High follows upon the demise of the last and most threatening of the earthly kingdoms, and so belongs to the future.

Not that the kingdom of God in Daniel is restricted to the future. Both Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and Darius the Mede are aware that this 'everlasting kingdom' can impinge directly on the affairs of men. In the strength of that kingdom, God delivers his subjects from the power of fire and lions, and demeans even emperors to the level of animals (Dan. 3:33; 4:31; 6:27 all MT). It is very much, therefore, a kingdom where God's people can experience real deliverance, in the present as well as the future. Even Darius testifies to having seen evidence of this kingdom—'[God] rescues and delivers, performs signs and wonders in heaven and earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions' (Dan. 6:28 MT).

IV. The Kingdom of God in the Psalms and Prophets

When one enquires how the notion of the kingdom of God might have developed in this way, there is evidence that Daniel and Chronicles were both dependent on earlier material. The prophetic literature and especially the Psalms seem to have influenced both works, mainly on the level of ideas and themes, but occasionally in a quite direct manner. As an example of the latter, the commonest phrase in Daniel concerning the kingdom, that 'his kingdom/dominion is an everlasting kingdom/dominion', seems to be derived from Psalm 145:13, 'Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion is for all generations', part of the most extended passage in the Psalter concerning the kingdom of Yahweh.²⁷ Phrases from this passage are also associated with the kingdom of God in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13. Compare, for example, these words from the Psalm: 'They will speak of the glory of your kingdom... making known to the sons of men your greatness and the glorious splendour of your kingdom' (vv. 11-13), with part of 1 Chr.

²⁷ Dan. 3:33 (MT); 4:31 (MT); 7:14, 27; cf. 2:44, 'a kingdom that is for ever'; 6:27 (MT), 'his dominion will never end'; 7:18, 'they will possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever'.

29:11, 'Yours, O Yahweh, is the greatness and the strength, the glory, the majesty, and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Yahweh, is the kingdom...'. It seems likely, therefore, that this possibly post-exilic psalm,²⁸ should be seen as evidence of a growing interest in the kingdom of God in later Israel.²⁹

The Chronicler, of course, made frequent use of the Psalms, and several of his references to the kingdom of God belong in a cultic context where the many of the psalms will have been employed (cf. 1 Chr. 16:31; 29:11; 2 Chr. 20:6).³⁰ In addition to Psalm 145, three psalms mention the kingdom of Yahweh. Two of these are unexceptional references in hymnic passages to God's universal kingdom, such as in Psalm 22:29 (MT; EVV v. 28), 'For the kingdom is Yahweh's, and he rules over the nations'. Despite the wide dimensions of this kingdom, it is to be noted that both here and in Psalm 103:19, it is clearly present in the world and is not an element of eschatological expectation. According to Psalm 103:19 the origins of God's throne and kingdom in fact belong to the past, 'Yahweh *has* established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all'.

The third reference, however, is in one of the most debated passages of the Psalter. The kingdom of God seems to overlap with the kingdom of David's dynasty in a most perplexing way in Psalm 45:7 (MT; EVV v. 6), 'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever; the sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness'. Interpreters seem forced to choose between an eschatological messianic view which seems to pay scant attention to the psalm's original context, and some form of cultic celebration of sacral kingship, though without necessarily attributing divine kingship to the Davidic line. It is also unclear whether this verse refers to God's throne or that

²⁸ Cf. e.g. L.C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (WBC, Waco 1983) 297; A.A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms II* (NCB, London, 1972) 936. For the view that at least Daniel is dependent on the psalm, see e.g. Lacocque, *Daniel* 87; Heaton, *Daniel* 155.

²⁹ For the view that the kingdom of God is the basic theme of Ps. 145, as revealed especially by its structure, cf. B. Lindars, *VT* 39 (1989) 23-30.

³⁰ Especially in 1 Chr. 16:8-36; 2 Chr. 6:41-2; cf. also e.g., references in 1 Chr. 29:14-16 to Pss. 16:19-20; 39:12; 102:11.

of the human king. However, according to Chronicles, both a divine and human throne could coexist in the Davidic dynasty without having to identify one with the other (cf. especially 1 Chr. 28:5; 29:23; 2 Chr. 9:8; 13:8). It is not therefore unreasonable to think of a similar convergence in Psalm 45, understanding verse 7a as a parenthetical address to God, in the manner of the Hebrew poets who could change the person of verbs and suffixes without warning.³¹ RSV^m expresses the general sense, 'Your throne is a throne of God', though unnecessarily modifying the force of the original. Psalm 45, therefore, does more than compare David's throne and kingship with God's. The kingdom and throne of God are actually thought to be present and active in the kingdom and throne of David. The divine kingdom is visible to men when the human king displays the divinely approved qualities of truth, humility, righteousness, and justice, and also on the occasion of a royal marriage when fresh hopes arise of continuing the Davidic dynasty into a new generation.

The prophetic literature contains only one direct mention of the kingdom of God. It occurs in Obadiah 21, in what might be called a context of restrained eschatology. The phrase, 'the kingdom will be Yahweh's' forms the climax of a prophecy concerning the day of Yahweh (vv. 15-21). That kingdom will be centred on Mount Zion, and will be characterized by deliverance for Israel. What is less certain is when that deliverance will take place. The dominant features of the context speak of the removal of the Edomites from the Promised land and their replacement by the returning Israelites. In other words, God's kingdom will be demonstrated by the return from exile, by God's keeping of his promises to restore Israel to their land. The eschatological aspects of this kingdom are therefore primarily concerned with the short term future, though the note of universal judgment (vv. 15-16) shows that long-term considerations are not entirely absent.

The concept of God's kingdom is not, however, restricted to this one verse in the prophets. As in Chronicles, Yahweh's kingdom is also symbolised by his throne, and is referred to as

³¹ Cf. GK §144p.

such by the prophets some seven times. Interestingly, the large majority locate God's throne in Zion. According to Jeremiah (17:12), 'the place of our sanctuary' is a 'glorious throne, exalted from the beginning', while Ezekiel looks forward to the new temple as 'the place of my throne' (Ezk. 43:7). It is entirely natural, therefore, that the Jerusalem temple was the place where Isaiah should cry out, 'My eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts' (Is. 6:5).³² Elsewhere in the prophets, God's throne is thought of as being in heaven (Isa. 66:1) and among the exiles in Babylonia (Ezk. 1:26).

The references to God's throne in the Psalms produce a very similar picture. The idea is found in some fourteen psalms, and again God is thought to have both a heavenly throne (e.g. Pss. 2:4; 11:4; 103:19) and an earthly throne in Zion (e.g. Pss. 9:12 MT; 22:4 MT; 99:1). There is perhaps a greater emphasis in the Psalms on the eternal nature of this throne and kingdom (e.g. Pss. 9:8 MT; 29:10; 93:2), while the special association in Ps. 45 between God's throne and David's throne has already received comment.³³

It will also be helpful to survey briefly the broader picture of God's kingship in the psalms and prophets.³⁴ An examination of references to Yahweh's title 'king', to the verb 'to reign' where he is the subject, and to his rule through an earthly king, reveals the following themes:

(i) Yahweh is a universal king. This well-known belief may be expressed either in terms of his rule over the nations (e.g. 47:8, 'God reigns over the nations'), or over all deities (e.g. 95:3, 'Yahweh is a great king over all gods'). In the prophets it is often made a ground for Yahweh's judgment of the nations.³⁵ On occasion, this results in a sharp opposition

³² Cf. also Isa. 6:1; 40:22; Jer. 8:19; 14:21; 17:12; Lam. 5:19.

³³ Cf. also Pss. 2:4; 9:5 MT (EVV v. 4); 47:9 MT (EVV v. 8); 55:20 MT (EVV v. 19); 80:2 MT (EVV v. 1); 89:15 MT (EVV v. 14); 102:13 MT (EVV v. 12).

³⁴ For Yahweh as 'king' (Heb. *melek*), Pss. 5:3; 10:16; 24:7-10; 29:10; 44:5; 47:3-8; 48:3; 68:25; 74:12; 84:4; 95:3; 98:6; 99:4; 145:1; 149:2; Isa. 6:5; 33:22; 41:21; 43:15; 44:6; Jer. 8:19; 10:7, 10; 46:18; 48:15; 51:57; Mic. 2:13; Zep. 3:15; Zec. 14:9, 16-17; Mal. 1:14. For Yahweh as subject of the verb *malak*, Pss. 47:9; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1; 146:10; Isa. 24:23; 52:7; Ezk. 20:33; Mic. 4:7.

³⁵ Pss. 29:10; 47:3-8; 93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1; Jer. 10:7, 10; 46:18; 48:15; 51:57; Mal. 1:14

between God's kingdom and all earthly kingdoms, as already noted in Daniel (cf. Pss. 2, 47).

(ii) Zion is the place of Yahweh's earthly throne, and also where his kingship is acknowledged and celebrated (e.g. Pss. 99:1-4; Isa. 6:1-5). Zion is usually understood to be the temple (e.g. Pss. 24:7-10; Ezk 43:7), but is sometimes regarded as the city of Jerusalem (Ps. 48:3, 'Mount Zion, the city of the great king'; Jer. 3:17).³⁶

(iii) God's kingship is clearly implied by his appointing earthly kings. In the royal psalms, for example, the God who installs his king on Zion and who laughs at the kings of the earth clearly enjoys a higher kingship (cf. Ps. 2). The prophets too confirm that God appoints kings, both in their own time and for the future.³⁷ Although all such references assume the kingship of Yahweh, one must differentiate one group which merely speaks of Yahweh's control of human kings from a second where divine and eternal qualities are intermingled with the reign of Yahweh's human king. It is in the latter that God's own kingship and kingdom are evident.

(iv) Yahweh's kingship is sometimes made the ground of appeal in laments, especially those of a corporate nature. For example, God's kingship twice inspires the hope of answered prayer (Ps. 5:3 MT [EVV v. 2]; 10:16), and twice more the hope of victory and salvation (Pss. 44:5; 74:12). Jeremiah similarly quotes the people's despairing cry, 'Is not Yahweh in Zion? Is her King not there?' (Jer. 8:19).

(v) Yahweh's kingship is demonstrated in historical events, most notably the return from exile. Indeed, in Isaiah 40-55, the cry 'Yahweh reigns' sums up the prophetic call for God's people to return to their land, and especially to Zion itself.³⁸

Three issues stand out for further comment. The first is the striking prominence given to Yahweh's kingship on Zion. Its priority is confirmed by Ollenburger's recent study of the

³⁶ Cf. also Pss. 68:23 MT (EVV v. 24); 84:4-5, 8 MT (EVV vv. 3-4, 7); 99:1-5; 146:10; 149:2; Isa. 24:23; 33:20-2; Jer. 8:19; Mic. 4:7-8.

³⁷ Cf. Isa. 9:7 MT (EVV v. 6); 32:1; 33:17; Jer. 23:5; Ezk. 37:24, 26; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 2:13.

³⁸ Isa. 52:7; cf. Isa. 41:21; 43:15; 44:6; Ezk 20:33; Ob. 21.

Psalms. He has concluded, 'the central theological symbol evoked by the symbol Zion is the kingship of Yahweh', and that Yahweh's kingship on Zion is 'the central feature of the Jerusalem cult tradition'.³⁹ The Chronicler therefore seems to depend on a well-established tradition in associating the kingdom of Yahweh and the temple. The triple association of the Davidic monarchy, the temple on Zion and God's kingship also has its origins in both Psalms and prophets, though only the Chronicler brings them directly together, above all in the case of Solomon.

Secondly, there is no clear conviction that the kingdom is eschatological. Both the prophets and the psalmists thought much more of God's kingdom as a visible reality in their own generation and in the near future. God's kingdom was active in heaven and on earth, and was particularly manifest in the Davidic throne, the sanctuary on Mount Zion, and in the return from exile. Even though there is often an implicit hope that something greater was yet to come, that did not prevent the psalmists from expressing their strong belief that 'the kingdom is Yahweh's' (Ps. 22:29 MT). The evidence of the laments is especially interesting on this point. Even when the signs of God's kingdom in Israel were under threat or apparently absent altogether, the psalmist who says to Yahweh, 'You gave us up to be devoured, you have scattered us among the nations' (Ps. 44:12 MT) still maintains his conviction, 'You are my King and my God, who commands victories for Jacob' (Ps. 44:5 LXX), and so prays, 'Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love' (v. 27 MT). This hope in God's kingship, firmly based in an already existing covenant, looks for imminent deliverance.

When the prophets speak of God's future kingship, they tend to refer more generally to God's kingly rule than to his kingdom in particular. Further, only rarely do they refer to a new era in the future when Yahweh will rule as king (cf. Zec. 14:9, 16-17). The main thrust of their message concerning God's future kingly rule is the certainty that God will restore kingship to his people. That kingship will be associated with Zion

³⁹ B.C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King* (JSOTS 41, Sheffield 1987) 50, 146.

and the Davidic dynasty, but its character and the timing of its restoration remains unspecific. For example, when Micah promises that 'the former dominion will come to you, kingship to the Daughter of Jerusalem' (Mic. 4:8), it is unclear whether this refers to the reappearance of the Davidic monarchy in Jerusalem or to the institution of a new divine kingdom.

Thirdly, a special problem is raised by the prophetic references to a future human king, who almost invariably, is to be a Davidic descendant. Typical examples include the promise that God will raise up 'to David a righteous Branch, a king who will reign wisely and do what is right and just in the land', with the name 'Yahweh-our-righteousness' (Jer. 23:5), and Isaiah's hope of a child who 'will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it and upholding it in justice and righteousness now and for ever' (Isa. 9:6 MT).⁴⁰ Only in this last passage do the prophets speak of this king ruling over a kingdom, though even this kingdom is David's rather than Yahweh's. The human, and indeed imminent aspects of this kingdom are also mentioned by Ezekiel, who expects the new David to assist Israel's return to the land in peace (Ezk. 37:24-5). On the other hand, his kingdom demonstrates certain divine qualities, such as the king's new divine name (Jer. 23:5) or the hope that his kingdom will be eternal. For the prophets, therefore, God's future kingly rule would be expressed through the person of a Davidic king rather than in a divine kingdom. Only the Chronicler, and the author of Psalm 45, saw in the Davidic line a clear sign of the kingdom of God.

V. The Origins of the Concept

The question of the origins of the kingdom of God in Israel must now be addressed. The concept certainly predates the origins of monarchy in Israel. This is not only implied by Yahweh's gift of kingship to David and Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 13:13; 15:28; 2 Sam. 5:12), but is required by Samuel's statement that even before Saul's reign, 'Yahweh your God was your king' (1 Sam. 12:12). Gideon rejected the crown for the same reason, because, as he said, 'Yahweh rules over you' (Jdg. 8:23). The emphasis on the

⁴⁰ Cf. also Isa. 32:1; 33:17; Mic. 2:13.

present and continuing nature of Yahweh's kingship is to be noted. This makes it unlikely that the origin of the concept is to be found in the ark's presence at Shiloh, as some have suggested on the basis of the earliest mention of Yahweh 'enthroned over the cherubim' (cf. 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2).⁴¹

Three of the Pentateuch's four direct references to Yahweh's kingly rule occur in poetic passages. They may belong to some of the Pentateuch's earlier strata, indicating that this belief was a real element in Israel's wilderness experiences. Yahweh was twice given the title 'king' in these passages (Num. 23:21; Dt. 33:5). God was believed to be among them, and Israel celebrated their conviction of his royal presence with a 'shout', which, as Buber recognised, is just as likely to have been occasioned by historical events as by regular cultic demands.⁴² The third poem contains the verbal statement, 'Yahweh reigns for ever and ever' (Ex. 15:18). Even here the thought is of a continuing kingship, not one that has begun as a result of Yahweh's mighty acts in the exodus.

Only in Ex. 19:6 is the term 'kingdom' found, where Israel receives the honorific epithet, 'kingdom of priests' (Ex. 19:6). Though this kingdom is not actually said to be God's, the emphasis of the context is very much on Israel's special relationship with God. Something of the nature of Israel's role as a kingdom is also defined. The central features are Israel's status as God's treasured possession, a redeemed and covenant people, who stand in God's very presence as priests.⁴³ Although this is the only place in the Old Testament where Israel is referred to as God's kingdom, and despite the fact that the phrase, 'kingdom of priests', is unique, this passage should

⁴¹ Cf. e.g. J. de Prairie, 'La royauté de Yahvé dans les textes concernant l'arche', *SVT* 15 (1966) 134-49; H.J. Kraus, *Theologie des Psalmen* (BKAT XV/3, Neukirchen 1979) 29; Ollenburger, *Zion* 36-8. Note also Alt's proposal, *Kleine Schriften* I 351ff., that the earliest indication of the kingdom of God is to be found in the pre-monarchic period in the Yahwist's references to Yahweh's heavenly court (e.g. Gen. 3:22; 11:7; cf. Job 1:6ff; 2:1ff; Ps. 29:1f., 9f.). Both approaches seem to render invalid V. Maag's view, 'Malkuth Yhwh', *SVT* 7 (1960) 129-53, that in the nomadic period Israel's God was regarded as leader, protector, and shepherd but not king.

⁴² Buber, *Kingship of God* 133-4.

⁴³ See further on this phrase, W.L. Moran, in J.L. McKenzie (ed.), *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought* (New York, 1962) 7-20.

not be regarded as of merely passing interest.⁴⁴ It establishes an ideal for Israel which she never really attained throughout the Old Testament period. It is likely that the later associations of the kingdom of Yahweh with Zion, the Davidic line, and the son of man, are part of the means by which this ideal was being restored, or rather, properly instituted. Indeed, one of the major reasons why the kingdom of God was spoken of so cautiously in much of the Old Testament may be precisely because of Israel's failure to measure up to its ideals.

Nevertheless, from the Sinai covenant onwards, Israel did maintain an awareness that she was subject to God's kingly rule, even though in the pre-monarchic period, that acknowledgement was quite restrained. Furthermore, the character of the kingdom was 'theo-political'.⁴⁵ In other words, it was to be demonstrated in daily life as expressed through Yahweh's gift of kingdom law, which it was Israel's privilege to accept and obey (cf. Ex. 19:3-8; Dt. 33:3b-5).⁴⁶ Even at Sinai, however, God's kingdom was 'without beginning of days or end of life'. The Old Testament never speaks of a beginning of Yahweh's kingship, but only of Israel coming to acknowledge that kingship for herself as she entered into covenant with her God.

VI. Conclusions

In conclusion, therefore, we may note:

(i) The notion of the kingdom of God is an aspect of the Old Testament's more general concept of God's kingly rule, but which begins to develop its own identity only towards the end of the Old Testament period.

(ii) The major expositors of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament are the authors of Daniel and Chronicles. Each in their different ways were dependent on both prophets and psalms, but the latter, and particularly Psalms 45 and 145, played a significant role in this development.

⁴⁴ A very similar view is found in Ps. 114:1-2.

⁴⁵ Buber, *Kingship of God* 126,128.

⁴⁶ Cf. Patrick, 'The Kingdom of God' 74-6.

(iii) Probably because the kingdom of God is not a separate theological entity, its nature cannot be expressed in a single thought. It has two main manifestations, a universal kingdom that encompasses the heavens as well as all the nations of the earth, and a more specific version in Israel centred on Zion. The kingdom of God is often in direct opposition to all earthly kingdoms, and will ultimately replace all other kingdoms.

(iv) Within Israel, the kingdom of God is associated with the nation from the beginning, especially with the Sinai covenant. Despite the claims of other deities to the title 'king', this kingdom was Yahweh's alone (cf. Ps. 22:29 MT; Ob. 21), and was a distinguishing mark of Israel's relationship with God. It was particularly visible in institutions associated with the Davidic covenant, that is, the Davidic monarchy and the Jerusalem temple.

(v) The kingdom of God is frequently thought to be manifest through human beings. There is a notable emphasis on the Davidic line--in the past, as in Chronicles, in the present, as in the Psalms, and in the future, as in the prophets. The kingdom is also mediated through the divine/human figure of a son of man.

(vi) The kingdom served to emphasize God's effective sovereignty rather than Israel's obedience to it. In the earlier texts, it was sometimes associated with the covenant law of the kingdom, and in the later ones with the thought that whatever the opposition, God's promised purposes would be fulfilled. As a result, it was a kingdom where deliverance and salvation were experienced and expected.

(vii) Though the eternal nature of the kingdom is sometimes emphasized, its present aspect is much more prominent than the future. An eschatological dimension is present in Daniel and the prophets, but it is often not clearly defined, and is rarely spoken of explicitly as a kingdom. The Old Testament writer's believed essentially that the kingdom of God was among them, though some certainly anticipated its greater revelation in the fulness of time.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ This paper was delivered as the Tyndale Old Testament Lecture for 1989.