

**KINGDOM OF GOD
SERIES. THE
RELIGION OF ISRAEL**

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Kingdom of God Series. The Religion of Israel by John Bayne Ascham

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JOHN BAYNE ASCHAM

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INTRODUCTION

"THY KINGDOM COME ON EARTH"

THE kingdom of God does not complete itself in the redemption of the individual. It concludes the individual and infinitely more. The Kingdom means that some day science and society, commerce and civics and letters and trade shall be sweetened, purified, and uplifted till they are in happy harmony with the will and purpose of the divine Father. Only so can there be anything like an adequate answer to the first petition of our Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come and thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven."

Jesus clearly intended that his disciples should interest themselves in the temporal and earthly aspects of the heavenly Father's dominion and power. They are to pray for the coming of his Kingdom, and the accomplishment of his will on earth, even as they pray for daily bread or for the forgiveness of sin. "Thy kingdom come. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins." To pray thus sincerely and intelligently presupposes active participation in the working program of the Kingdom; that is, in all those activities making for that transformation and reconstruction of life through which alone individuals and organized society can be brought into accord with the will and the rule of God.

Too often in human history the sharp contrast between actual conditions and the higher demands of the Christian ideal has discouraged those upon whom rested the responsibility for making that ideal real. A short-range view of life has obscured the actual growth of the Kingdom which the larger perspective of history reveals. In the face of the overwhelming preponderance of sin and selfishness in the world the Christian Church has again and again contented itself with snatching as many brands as possible from the

burning, without, at the same time, seeking to organize the constructive forces of life and of society for the seemingly impossible task of putting out the conflagration. Thus the actual process of the Kingdom's coming among men has proceeded for the most part "without observation," like the first growth of the seed that has been buried in the soil.

It is possible to-day, in the light of the completed records of the Old and New Testaments and the subsequent history of the Christian centuries, to discover definite stages of advance with successive landmarks of progress in the gradual establishment of the reign of God in individual lives and in the institutions of mankind. Such a survey of progress already achieved should hearten the organized Christian forces in their forward look and their endeavor to establish still more firmly among men the principles and ideals of the Kingdom. It should encourage the individual to redouble his efforts and inspire in him an unflinching confidence in the ultimate realization and triumph of God's rule. Herein lies the purpose of the special course of study in the Development of the Kingdom of God in which this volume constitutes one textbook.

Beginning with a brief consideration of the fundamentals of religion and the nature of man and of Deity, the studies trace the development of religious experience and ideas among the Hebrews and the Jewish people down to the beginning of the Christian era. This early period, covering the development of the Kingdom in Old Testament times, is presented in two volumes of twenty-six study chapters each, the division being made at the point in the historical development following the rise of eighth-century prophetism and the fall of Samaria. The first of these periods is covered by this volume, "*The Religion of Israel.*" The second is dealt with in "*The Religion of Judah.*" In similar manner two volumes are devoted to the Life and Teachings of Jesus which are assumed to be of central importance in the forward and upward movement of humanity.

Subsequent studies present in two volumes a survey of the Development of the Kingdom since the time of Christ,

including a discussion of those social-religious movements of the present day, the support and inspiration for which are to be found primarily in the Christian conception of God and the world. The concluding volume of the series is entitled *The Christian Hope* and presents in constructive form the abiding faith of the Christian fellowship in the final triumph of the kingdom of God.

It is confidently expected that in their revised form these studies will serve a two-fold purpose. As elective courses for adult Bible classes interested in this vital and most fascinating of all studies, their usefulness has been much enhanced. At the same time they are intended to meet the increasing demand for modern textbooks written in scholarly spirit but popular style for preparatory and high schools and for advanced groups in week-day religious instruction in local parishes. That they are admirably suited for either purpose will be evident from an examination of any one of the volumes in the series.

THE EDITORS.

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

"The glorious city of God is my theme" are the opening words of Augustine's immortal work which arose out of his conviction that there has appeared in human history "a commonwealth and community founded and governed by God." That conviction underlies this study of the religion of Israel and the subsequent volumes of this series. Men are not the final agents of human progress nor the arbiters of human destiny. Our human will roots at last in the will of God. If we seek and learn and fulfill his will, our life becomes safe, beautiful, and rich in worth and meaning. We become members of God's kingdom.

This volume is not merely an historical study. To know the manner in which our fellow men of any race or century have aspired and struggled is worthy of our best efforts. But this book does not seek merely to put its readers into possession of certain facts of Israel's history. It attempts, by whatever light it throws upon the struggle