

AUGUST 2021 ... VACATION STUDIES / KINGDOM OF GOD

Most of the biblical references to the kingdom of God are found in the teachings of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels. The subject of the kingdom of God was central in Jesus' teaching. Yet nowhere did Jesus say exactly what the kingdom was, and neither did the writers of the New Testament who followed Him, even though they too spoke of the kingdom.

Perhaps the reason for this was that people who knew the Old Testament should already have been familiar with the idea of God's kingdom. Jesus' teaching on the kingdom was a development of the Old Testament teaching, showing that through Him the kingdom found its fullest meaning.

What the kingdom of God is

Throughout the Bible the kingdom of God is the rule of God. It *is* not a territory over which He reigns, but the rule which He exercises. It is defined not by a geographic location, an era of existence, or the nationality of a people, but by the sovereign rule and authority of God (Exod 15:18; Ps 103:19; 145:10-13).

Jesus likewise understood God's kingdom as God's rule rather than as a territory or a people. The person who seeks God's kingdom seeks God's rule in his life (Matt 6:33); the person who receives God's kingdom receives God's rule in his life (Mark 10:15). The prayer for God's kingdom to come is a prayer that his rule be accepted, so that His will is done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10). The kingdom is a realm in the spiritual, rather than the physical, sense. The person who enters the kingdom of God enters the realm where he accepts God's rule (Matt 21:31).

The world at present is in a state of rebellion against God's rule, because it is under the power of Satan (2 Cor 4:4; 1 John 5:19; ... Therefore, when the kingdom of God came among mankind in the person of Jesus Christ, the rule of God was demonstrated in the defeat of Satan. As Jesus proclaimed the kingdom, He healed those who were diseased and oppressed by evil spirits, and in so doing He gave evidence of His power over Satan (Matt 4:23-24). His deliverance of people from the bondage of Satan was proof that God's kingdom (his authority, power, rule) had come among them (Matt 12:28; Mark 1:27; Luke 10:9,17-18).

There is a sense, therefore, in which all people experience the kingdom; for all people experience (or one day will experience) the sovereign authority of God, either in blessing or in judgment (Matt 12:28; Rev 11:15,18; 19:15-16). But the important aspect of the kingdom that the Gospels emphasize is that it came among mankind through Jesus. Because John the Baptist announced the coming of the kingdom of Jesus, he brought to a close the pre-kingdom era (Matt 3:2; Luke 16:16). Even the most insignificant person in the new era enjoys blessings that the greatest person of the former era never knew (Matt 11:11).

Note: The kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are different names for the same thing. The Bible uses the expressions interchangeably (Matt 19:23-24). Jews had developed the practice of showing great respect for the name of God, and because they feared that they might use that name irreverently, they often used the word 'heaven' instead of 'God' (Dan 4:25-26; Luke 15:18; John 3:27). Matthew, who wrote his Gospel for the Jews, usually (but not always) speaks of God's kingdom as the kingdom of heaven, whereas the other Gospel writers call it the kingdom of God (Matt 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16).

Both present and future

In contrast to the popular Jewish belief that God's kingdom was a future national and political kingdom to be centred on Israel, Jesus pointed out that God's kingdom was already present among them. It was present in Him (Luke 10:9; 17:20-21).

When people willingly humbled themselves and submitted to the rule of Christ, they immediately entered Christ's kingdom. And by entering the kingdom they received forgiveness of sins and eternal life (Matt 21:31; Mark 10:14-15; John 3:3). Not only those of Jesus' time, but people of any era, when they believe in Him, immediately enter His kingdom and receive the kingdom's blessings (Rom 14:17; Col 1:13).

Yet Jesus spoke also of the kingdom as something belonging to the future (Mark 14:25), whose establishment could take place only after he had suffered and died (Luke 18:31-33; 22:15-16; 24:26; Rev 5:6-12; 11:15). Even for those who were already believers, Jesus spoke of his kingdom as something yet future, which they would enter at His return (Matt 7:21-23; 13:41-43; 25:31-34). For this reason Christians, who are already in the kingdom, also look forward to the day when they will inherit the kingdom (1 Cor 15:50; 2 Peter 1:11).

A person may well ask how the kingdom of God can be something that is present here and now, yet be something that awaits the future. The answer lies in our understanding of the kingdom of God as the sovereign rule of God. Believers enter the kingdom as soon as they believe, but they will experience the full blessings of the kingdom only when Christ returns to punish evil and reign in righteousness (1 Cor 15:24-26; ...

To 'enter the kingdom of God' is to 'have eternal life' or to 'be saved'. The Bible uses these expressions interchangeably (Matt 19:16,23-25). Just as the believer experiences the kingdom of God now and will do so more fully in the future, so he has eternal life now but will experience it in its fulness when Christ returns (John 5:24,29). Likewise he has salvation now, but he will experience the fulness of his salvation at the return of Christ (Eph 2:8; Heb 9:28). Eternal life is the life of the kingdom of God, the life of the age to come; but because the kingdom of God has come among mankind now, people have eternal life now (Matt 25:34,46; John 3:3,5,15; 5:24).

The mystery of the kingdom

The truth that the teaching of Jesus makes clear is not simply that God's kingdom is present in the world now, but that people can enter that kingdom now, even though the world is still under the power of Satan. This is a truth that people did not understand till Jesus explained it. He referred to this present aspect of the kingdom as a mystery, or secret (Mark 4:11). By using the word 'mystery', Jesus did not mean that he was telling people something to confuse them. He meant rather that he was telling them something that previously God had kept secret but was now making known. (Similar uses of 'mystery' occur elsewhere in the New Testament; cf. Rom 16:25-26; Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:26; ...)

In Old Testament times people expected God's kingdom to come in one mighty act, when God would destroy all earthly kingdoms and establish his rule throughout the world (Dan 2:44-45; Zech 14:9; ...). It seems that, to some extent, John the Baptist also had this idea of the kingdom of God. That may have been why he became worried when Jesus did not immediately set up a world-conquering kingdom (Matt 3:11-12; 11:2-3; cf. Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6).

To reassure John, Jesus pointed out that the miracles of healing he performed were in keeping with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah's mission. His kingdom had begun (Matt 11:4-6; ...; MIRACLES). That kingdom was not yet established in the world-conquering sense that John and others expected, but it had begun to do its work by delivering people from the power of Satan and offering them new life in Jesus Christ (Luke 17:20-21).

God's kingdom is present now, though not in the form it will have after the great events at the climax of the world's history. It is hidden rather than open. It is entered voluntarily, not forced upon mankind with irresistible power. This is the mystery of the kingdom, the previously unknown purpose of God that Jesus revealed.

Parables of the kingdom

Jesus emphasized this mystery of the kingdom in the parables recorded in Matthew 13 (Matt 13:11; see PARABLE). The parable of the seed and the soils shows that because people are free to accept or reject the message of the kingdom, most reject it. But those who accept it experience great spiritual growth in their lives (Matt 13:18-23; cf. 23:13). The parable of the wheat and the weeds teaches that in the present world those who are in God's kingdom live alongside those who are not; but in the day of judgment, when God's kingdom will be established openly, believers will be saved and the rest punished (Matt 13:24-30,34-43).

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast illustrate that although the kingdom may appear to have insignificant beginnings, it will one day have worldwide power and authority (Matt 13:31-33). The parables of the hidden treasure and the valuable pearl illustrate that when a person is convinced of the priceless and lasting value of the kingdom of God, he will make any sacrifice to enter it (Matt 13:44-46). Nevertheless, there are both the true and the false among those who claim to be in God's kingdom. The parable of the fishing net shows that these will be separated in God's decisive judgment at the close of the age (Matt 13:47-50).

Practical demands of the kingdom

Although a person may desire the kingdom of God above all else (Matt 6:33; 13:44-46), no person can buy his way into it. The right of entry into that kingdom is the gift of God and, as with God's other gifts, people must accept it humbly by faith (Mark 10:15; Luke 12:32). The work of God produces eternal life within a person and introduces him into the kingdom of God. It is a work that no person can do, no matter how hard he tries; yet God does it for any person who trusts in Him (Mark 4:26-29; 10:17,23-27; John 3:3,15).

Neither a person's good deeds nor his status in life can gain him entrance into the kingdom of God. What God demands is repentance a total change that gives up all self-sufficiency for the sake of following Christ as king (Matt 4:17; 5:20; 19:23; Luke 9:62). It is a decision that requires the full force of a person's will (Luke 16:16).

All who enter God's kingdom come under His rule, where He teaches them the qualities of life that He requires of them. Yet they look upon His commands not as laws that they are forced to obey, but as expressions of His will that they find true happiness in doing (Matt 5:3,10; 1 John 5:3-4). They learn that the principles that operate in the kingdom of God are different from those that operate in the kingdoms of the world (Matt 20:20-28; John 18:36). Having come into the enjoyment of the rule of Christ themselves, they then spread the good news of His kingdom throughout the world (Matt 10:7; 24:14; Acts 8:12; 19:8; 28:23,31).

Those who serve the kingdom of God may bring persecution and suffering upon themselves (Matt 10:7,16-22; Acts 14:22; 2 Thess 1:5). God, however, will preserve them through their troubles and bring them into the full enjoyment of his kingdom in the day of its final triumph (Luke 18:29-30; 2 Tim 4:18; 2 Peter 1:11).

The kingdom and the church

God's purpose was that when the Messiah came, the people of Israel would be the first to hear the good news of the kingdom. Upon accepting the Messiah, they would enter God's kingdom and then spread the good news to all nations (Isa 49:5-6; Matt 10:6-7; 15:24). But when Israel on the whole rejected the Messiah, God sent the message to the nations direct. Gentiles who believed entered the kingdom, but Jews for whom the kingdom had been prepared were excluded (Matt 8:10-12; 20:1-16; 21:33-43; Acts 13:46-47; 28:23-31).

The reason many of the Jews rejected Jesus was that He did not bring them the type of kingdom they were looking for. They wanted a Messiah who would be a political deliverer, and they wanted a kingdom that would bring material prosperity. Jesus was opposed to both ideas (John 6:15; 18:36). Even the apostles did not fully understand the nature of the Messiah and the kingdom, but they did not, as others, reject Jesus. They knew that he was indeed the Messiah of God who brought to mankind the kingdom of God and eternal life (Matt 16:13-16; John 6:66-69).

The believing minority among the Jews (the old people of God, the nation Israel) became the nucleus of the new people of God, the Christian church. To build the old people of God, God chose twelve tribes; to build the new people of God, he chose twelve apostles. As they preached the good news of Jesus Christ, the apostles opened the kingdom to all who wished to enter. They carried God's authority with them, so that when they acted in obedience to his word, their work on earth was confirmed in heaven (Matt 16:18-19; Acts 8:12; 20:24-25; 28:31).

As a result of the apostles' preaching of the kingdom of God, people believed. The faithful of old Israel became God's true Israel; believers of other nations became Abraham's spiritual offspring (Rom 2:28-29; Gal 3:28-29; 6:16). The church came into being and grew. In the great acts of God seen on the Day of Pentecost and during the months that followed, the apostles saw the power of the kingdom of God at work in a way they had never imagined (Mark 9:1).

However, the church is not the kingdom, just as Israel was not the kingdom. The church and the kingdom are things of a different kind. The kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a community of people. It is the new community of God's people, just as Israel was the old community. The kingdom works through the church, but it is something far wider than the church. It worked in the days before the church was born, and it will continue to work till the day of God's final triumph (1 Cor 15:24-28; Rev 11:15). In the meantime the church is the means by which God's rule should most clearly be seen in the world (John 17:23; Rom 14:16-18; Eph 3:10;

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With the above paragraph being stated: The church functions within God's kingdom. Kingdom living and life ought to be seen through the church. One can see "Colonization" in that aspect. The church, the body of Christ inheriting the kingdom prepared before the foundation of the world.