

A prominent theme in the New Testament is the kingdom of God. No serious student of scripture can have failed to observe that in the teaching of Jesus Christ a leading place was given to this kingdom. This is seen most strikingly in the account of Matthew. In it Jesus is continually speaking of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, and He leaves no doubt that a rich blessing awaits those who become a part of it, that it is the thing to be sought “first” in one’s life, and indeed is the “pearl of great price.”

It is necessary, therefore, if we are to have a proper grasp of the mind of Christ and of His purposes for mankind, that we have an understanding of His teaching regarding the kingdom. Unfortunately, there is much confusion about the kingdom and even a great deal of error that is militantly promoted concerning it. By considering the different uses of the expression “the kingdom of God” in the scriptures, it is hoped that much of the confusion will be dissipated and a clearer understanding will emerge.

The Universal Kingdom

There are many references in the Old Testament to the kingdom of God in this sense. In Psalms 103:19 we read: “The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.” In Daniel 4:3, Nebuchadnezzar exclaims: “How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation.” See also Daniel 4:34,35.

There are many such passages in the Old Testament. They clearly reveal that God has always been and will always be absolute King over all things. He is the sovereign Ruler over the universe---over all things, whether intelligent or unintelligent, whether animate or inanimate, whether willingly subject to Him or not. In this sense, even Hell and Satan are in God’s kingdom,

for God is over all! As Milton so well expressed it: “He, be sure, in height or depth, still first and last will reign sole King, and of His kingdom lose no part.”

The Jewish Kingdom

In 2 Chronicles 13:8 we read of “the kingdom of the Lord, which is in the hand of the sons of David.” What is covered by this phrase is a special kingship over the people of Israel. Note also verse 5 of the same chapter. This kingdom of God, which began at Sinai, over which Saul, David, and his sons were afterward made rulers, was clearly a very limited kingdom as compared with the universal kingdom previously noted. However, though limited in extent, it deepened in moral and spiritual significance! Indeed, a very special favor was bestowed upon Israel in being designated as God’s kingdom.

There is little significance in claiming a place in God’s universal kingdom when you consider that mere material things as much as intelligent beings, Satan as well as Gabriel, the most wicked as well as the most virtuous, are all included. Obedience to God was the ground on which Israel was constituted His special kingdom (Exod.19:5,6). As all students of biblical history know, Israel broke her covenant with God by disobedience (such disobedience culminating in the rejection of His Son), and as a special kingdom of God was finally destroyed.

Thus we note that the term “kingdom of God” is used in a broad sense, and also in a limited or special sense. This presents no difficulty. The Psalmist regarded God’s kingship over all as underscoring the greatness of the honor bestowed upon Israel in having Him in a peculiar sense their King: “Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For our God is the King of all the earth” (Psa.47:6,7).

The Current Kingdom

We now refer to the kingdom or church under Christ. During the time of the preceding kingdom of God over Israel, Daniel made the following prediction: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (Dan.2:44). This is tantamount to a prediction that the Hebrew nation would cease to be God’s kingdom in a special sense. That this was God’s plan is seen in the following statement of Jesus: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matt.21:43).

This present kingdom is the one John and Jesus announced as being “at hand” (Matt.3:2; 4:17). In fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Dan.2:44; Isa.2:2-4; etc.) this kingdom came into being on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection and subsequent ascension of the Lord (Acts 2). From that point forward it was always described as a present reality (see Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9; 1 Corinthians 15:24,25). The present kingdom is the same as the church, the body of Christ, the family of God, the temple of God, the army of the Lord and the vineyard of the Lord, all such descriptions being but different figures or similes of the same entity---the children of God in Christ Jesus, the redeemed.

To understand the nature or character of this current kingdom is vital. This failure on the part of the Jews led to their rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah. They, like the premillennialists of today, conceived of the kingdom as a material or earthly one. Jesus rebuked the twelve for such thinking and warned them that “unless you are converted (i.e., change your misconception of the kingdom) and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt.18:3).

No doubt in some respects the kingdoms of men give the starting point for understanding certain things about the kingdom of God, yet the Savior’s chief teaching on the kingdom was directed to pointing out, not its likeness to, but its difference

from, all earthly kingdoms. The kingdom of God is spiritual from beginning to end. Whether one thinks of the head or king---it is Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev.19:16)---or its makeup---“the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb.12:23)---or its purpose---to serve as “the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim.3:15) and as its King “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk.19:10)---it is wholly spiritual and thus “not of this world” (Jno.18:36). As Paul so well expressed it, “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom.14:17).

Consequently one enters it, not by a physical birth as the Jews entered their kingdom, but by a new birth, a spiritual one (Jno.3:3,5). Napoleon had it right when he observed: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and myself founded great empires: but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this day millions would die for Him.”

The Future Kingdom

Finally, the Bible teaches that there is yet a future kingdom for the redeemed who are still in this present world. It is not, however, an earthly one of a thousand years duration. Rather, it is the heavenly kingdom of eternity. Listen to the apostle Peter: “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Notice that this is addressed to those who are in the current kingdom under Christ, but they have not yet entered this future kingdom of eternity and can only do so by meeting the conditions of the text.

Jesus is likewise referring to this future kingdom in Matthew 7:21 when he says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in

heaven.” This is apparent from the context, for He will declare such “in that day,”--- i.e., at the universal judgment and the commencement of eternity for all (verse 22).

So we see that God has one increasing purpose. It evidently was not His pleasure to be our King only in the broadest sense. As you will observe, each of the succeeding kingdoms increases in significance and exclusiveness over the preceding one. And to enter that future kingdom of bliss, we must first become and remain loyal citizens of the present one. Are you in that kingdom?

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1414 West Exchange Pkwy.
Allen, TX 75013

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by
Foy Vinson

**“And in the days of these kings the
God of heaven will set up a kingdom
which shall never be destroyed.”
(Daniel 2:44)**

The Bible Has The Answer