

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?



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Some of the world's mightiest empires have come and gone, having been reduced to kingdoms of relics and sand. But the Bible speaks of a kingdom that will never end—the Kingdom of God. Just what does Scripture reveal about this kingdom?

Jesus Christ came preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. “The time is fulfilled,” He said, “and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). What is this kingdom? How was it “at hand”? And why is this message called “the gospel,” or good news?

The word “kingdom” in our English Bibles is a translation of the Greek word *basileia*, whose Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents are *malkuth* and *malkutha*, respectively. These terms mean much more than “kingdom,” “government,” or “empire.” They may be translated, “kingship,” “reign,” or “sovereignty.” Thus, the gospel of the Kingdom of God is the good news of God’s *reign* over His creation.

Daniel describes the future Reign of God

The prophet Daniel describes the Kingdom of God as a world-ruling empire that will “break in pieces and consume all these [preceding] kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44). Unlike the preceding kingdoms—the Neo-Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greco-Macedonian, and Roman empires—the kingdom established by the God of heaven will never be reduced to ruin or be succeeded by or absorbed into another kingdom.

Daniel describes the King of the Kingdom of God as “One like the Son of Man” who receives His authority from the “Ancient of Days.” Christians recognize the former is Jesus Christ and the latter is God the Father. Daniel states:

Then to Him [Christ] was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:14).

According to Daniel, the One like the Son of Man—Christ—will not rule alone. Daniel continues,

Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting

kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him (Daniel 7:27).

The “kingdom and dominion” will be “given to the...saints of the Most High.” This means simply that the true people of God will reign with Christ, who will exercise authority over “all dominions,” or governments—hence the title “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” This prophecy is reiterated in the book of Revelation, which is widely recognized as a companion to the book of Daniel.

The Kingdom in Revelation

John, who received the Revelation, describes Christ as “One like the Son of Man” (Revelation 1:13), a Messianic epithet drawn from the book of Daniel.

Christ affirms, “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations...as I also received from My Father” (Revelation 2:26, 28). The saints, as “kings and priests to our God,” will “reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10; cf. 20:4). To those who successfully combat the influence of the devil and pulls of the flesh, Christ promises, “I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21). All this is reminiscent of Daniel’s descriptions of the future Kingdom of God.

From the above we learn that the Kingdom of God is not only the world-ruling *government* of God; it may also be defined as the ruling *family* of God—that is, the Kingdom subsists in the King and His co-regents. The Kingdom, you will recall, is “*given to...* the saints of the Most High and is “an everlasting kingdom,” meaning that it continues indefinitely, transcending the temporal reign of “a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4) and encompassing the everlasting New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21:1).

The Kingdom prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others, consistent with Daniel’s prophecies, connect the future Kingdom with the restoration of Israel under the reign of the ideal Davidic king, a reign that expands to include all the nations of the earth. But a much fuller picture of the Kingdom of God emerges from the teachings of the New Testament.

Facts about the Kingdom

While the Kingdom of God in its fullness is clearly a future reality—the “eschatological Kingdom,” as theologians often call it—it can be said that the Kingdom of God takes in the entire sphere of God’s reign—past, present, and future. For this reason, the New Testament speaks of the Kingdom as an “already but not yet” phenomenon, as a spiritual reality as well as a powerfully influential institution. These terms are not contradictory; they merely speak of the multiple aspects of the Kingdom.

Here are several important facts relative to the gospel of the Kingdom of God:

1) *Jesus was sent for the purpose of preaching the Kingdom of God.* When a crowd of Galileans urged Jesus not to leave their city, “He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent’” (Luke 4:43).

While preaching was not Jesus' sole purpose for coming to this earth, it was nevertheless an essential function of His ministry—one of the primary reasons for His coming.

2) *There is a sense in which the Kingdom of God was already present in the time of Jesus and the apostles.* Jesus said the Kingdom “is at hand (Mark 1:15) and “has come near you” (Luke 10:9, 11). Reprimanding the religious leaders who accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus said, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (Mathew 12:28; see also Luke 11:20). Similarly, when the Pharisees asked Him when the Kingdom of God would come, He replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:19-21). The term “within” is better rendered “among,” or “in the midst of.” The Kingdom was *in the midst* (certainly not *within*) the Pharisees because the King of the Kingdom stood in their midst at that moment. Where the King is, there is the Kingdom.

3) *There is a sense in which the Kingdom of God has not yet come.* Jesus gave His disciples the Parable of the Minas in order to correct their misunderstanding that “the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (Luke 19:11). Years later, Paul and Barnabas urged believers to “continue in the faith,” reminding them that “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). If believers are already in the Kingdom of God—if they are already experiencing the fullness of the Kingdom—it is pointless to speak of enduring tribulations as a prerequisite to *entering* the Kingdom. Paul and Barnabas were speaking of the *eschatological* Kingdom, which will commence with the Second Coming of Christ and come to full maturity in the New Heaven and New Earth period (Revelation 20-22).

4) *There is continuity between the Old Testament kingdom and the future kingdom.* Jesus' disciples expected the risen Lord to “restore the kingdom to Israel.” Rather than tell them His kingdom had nothing to do with Israel, He replied, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:6).

Jesus declared that many from east and west would “sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out” (Matthew 8:11-12). The “children of the kingdom” are those physical descendents of Jacob—Israelites—who reject Jesus as the promised Messiah. Jesus said the Kingdom would be taken from them “and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43).

Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God is rooted firmly in prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel. Even God's promise to “make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31) is in the context of the future restoration of Israel and Judah as a kingdom united under the reign of a Davidic “Branch of righteousness” (Jeremiah 33:15), whom we recognize as Jesus Christ. So, dispensationalist claims notwithstanding, the gospel of the Kingdom of God rests solidly on the foundation of the kingdom promises of the Old Testament.

5) *Those who intend to be citizens of the Kingdom of God must place seeking it at the head of their list of priorities.* Jesus cautioned His disciples about worrying over physical

things, urging them rather to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [food, drink, clothing] will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). Anyone truly seeking the Kingdom of God will commit himself fully to submitting to the Reign of God *now*.

And that brings us to *you*. Have you turned to God in heart-rending repentance—confessing your sins to Him and expressing your desire for forgiveness and regeneration—and accepted the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ? In other words, *have you fully submitted to the Reign of God?*

If yes, it's time for the next step. What is it?

You'll find the answer in Acts 2:38.

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