

"Has the Kingdom Already Come?"

The kingdom of the Lord is one of the primary themes of the Bible. God desires to reign over the hearts and lives of men. It was rebellion against God's authority that led to the fall of man and our ruined state from which Christ had to redeem us. And to be restored and reconciled to God means more than the forgiveness of sin and the promise of going to heaven one day; it also means that we submit to God and to His authority, which in this age has been given to Jesus Christ, His Son. Therefore, we honor Jesus as the Lord and King over all kings.

There is much confusion over the 'kingdom of the Lord' today. What kind of kingdom is it? Is it here or is it to come? Are all men part of it or is it made up of only certain people?

Matthew 4:12-17 "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Jesus came preaching the good news of His coming kingdom, that it was "*at hand*." Well, was it, or are we still waiting for it? Let's turn to the word of God for answers.

First John, then Jesus, came preaching the good news of the kingdom. The word *kingdom*, merely refers to *Christ's reign in the earth or the rule of God over men*. The message of both men was simple: the long-awaited kingdom of the Messiah was at hand. That's Bible language. The rule of God was about to commence. It was imminent. But, there is a great deal of confusion about that. There was in Jesus' day and people are still confused about it today. Not over the fact that the Messiah would rule over a kingdom; nearly all who believe that Jesus is the Messiah believe that He is a king. The confusion is over the concept of His rule, the nature of His kingdom, and when the kingdom came or will come.

Let's look at the great misunderstanding that people had about the kingdom in Jesus' own day. The prophets had all foretold of a coming Messianic king who would one day rule on the throne that David had once occupied. The great hope of the Jews was that their king would come and deliver them. But what did that mean to them?

David and Solomon represented the glory days of Israel to the ancient Jew. Israel was sovereign, secure and prosperous during those early years, but it didn't remain that way for long. After Solomon died and his son took over the throne, the kingdom was divided: there were the northern tribes and then there was Judah. Trouble would follow God's people from then on because they sinned and rebelled against the Lord. God handed them over to their enemies and His people became captives and servants. For example, there was the long period where the Jews were carried off to Babylon and were captive there. Their beloved, holy city of Jerusalem was laid waste, the walls broken down and the temple destroyed.

They eventually returned from Babylon, but it wasn't the same. During the intertestamental period-- that is the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments-- they came under the rule of the Romans. In fact, this was not very long before Jesus was born. Their political fate shaped and molded their concept of the promised Messiah. Instead of anticipating a Messiah who would break the fetters of sin from their hearts and souls, they were looking for a Messiah or leader who would break the yoke of the Roman Caesar from their necks. You see, they resented the rule of the Romans, particularly paying taxes to the Roman government. Tired of being subjects to other kings, they yearned to have their sovereignty back. So, that was the mindset of the Jewish people during those last years of the intertestamental period and at the time that Jesus was born into the world. It is essential that we understand that historical basis. That's what they wanted and expected in a Messiah and His attendant kingdom. They envisioned a powerful leader who would arise and lead their liberation from the Roman government, making them a sovereign nation once again.

Well, they misunderstood all of their prophets as well as God's promises about a kingdom. So, with these misconceptions in place, when John the Baptist came before Jesus, heralding the soon coming kingdom, the news was met with excitement by many. John told the people to *repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins* in anticipation of the Messiah and His kingdom, for it was at hand. We read about how John baptized multitudes of people who responded to his preaching.

Matthew 3:1-2 "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

John, being the harbinger of Christ says, "*the kingdom is at hand.*" It is near. The long awaited promise is about to come to pass. Had you lived in John's time and heard him preach that message, how would you have interpreted it? Regardless of what you thought the kingdom represented, wouldn't you have understood that whatever it is, it is about to be established? How else would they have interpreted John's statement, "*the kingdom is at hand?*" It's very hard to imagine them hearing John preach, while envisioning a kingdom that was still thousands of years away. So, in the lifetime of John, the kingdom was near.

Well, John fulfills his ministry and steps aside. He is put in prison and Jesus begins His ministry. So, what did Jesus preach?

Mark 1:14-15 "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Jesus picks up the message begun by John. He says, "*The time is fulfilled.*" In other words, *it's now time*. This kingdom that God has been promising you for hundreds of years is at hand. The time is right. There are many, many people who believe that the time wasn't right. In fact, most preachers that you hear today not only contend that the kingdom still has not come 2,000 years after Jesus spoke these words, but they even suggest or imply that the rejection that Jesus faced by the Jews meant that God delayed the kingdom until another and still future time. If only the Jews had received Jesus as the Messiah, then He would've established the kingdom then. But because they instead rejected Him, the time just wasn't right. Their doctrine of "dispensational premillennialism" says that one day the Jews WILL receive Him and that will be the time that He finally takes up His rule and sets up His kingdom.

But what did Jesus say? *“The time is fulfilled. The kingdom is at hand.”* Friend, nothing takes God by surprise. Nothing caught Jesus unawares. He’s omniscient. God knew that the Jewish nation would reject His Son. The apostle Paul would later say this:

Galatians 4:4 “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law...”

That is, *when the time was right*, God sent His Son. Jesus came exactly when God determined that He would come. God’s calendar was not off by one day! When Jesus came, He said, *It’s time. The time is fulfilled.* Prophecy was being fulfilled. ALL of the pieces were being put into place, and the kingdom was at hand. Now, again, would anyone listening to Jesus walk away with the idea that He was promising something that was still at least 2,000 years away from fulfillment? Who could believe that? No, they may have misunderstood what He meant by a “kingdom,” but they understood that whatever the kingdom was, it was very near. It was imminent.

Then we see that Jesus sent out the twelve and commanded them as follows:

Matthew 10:5-7 “These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

There it is again, nothing has changed. Later, Jesus sends out seventy others to preach from city to city, and instructs them thus:

Luke 10:9 “And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”

The sad thing is, most of them were going to miss out on the kingdom, but that didn’t prevent Jesus from doing what He said He would do. Over and over again, inspiration says that at that time, 2,000 years ago, in the first century, *the kingdom is at hand, the kingdom is nigh*. Think about how preposterous it is to suggest that the rejection of the Jewish leaders somehow took the Lord by surprise, and that He had to alter the long-standing plan of God and put the church in the place of the kingdom. I mean, God sends Jesus in the fullness of time, He comes saying that the time is fulfilled, get ready because the kingdom is at hand, but all of a sudden, things go sour and God has to back up and delay the promised kingdom...I have more faith in the foreknowledge and wisdom of God than to believe such a thing!

Not only did John, and then Jesus, and then Jesus’ disciples come saying *the kingdom is at hand*, but long before that, the Old Testament prophets prophesied the timing of the kingdom—hundreds of years before Jesus even came, the Holy Spirit inspired them to write of the very season and time when the kingdom would come. The Holy Spirit guiding the Old Testament prophets was very specific about this, and if they would only heed their own scriptures, they would’ve recognized what all was taking place when Jesus came.

For example, take the prophecy of Daniel. 600 years before Jesus was born, Daniel was carried off to Babylon, and while he was there, the king had a dream about this powerful man or great image of a man, with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet of

iron and clay. Remember reading that in the book of Daniel? King Nebuchadnezzar was perplexed by his dream, so he called on Daniel to interpret the dream (**Daniel 2:31-44**). Daniel explains to the king that this image with the various parts represented four great kingdoms or empires that would arise. He begins by describing the Babylonian empire that was in power at the time. He said that it was represented by the head of gold, as it was a mighty and powerful kingdom. But he said that a lesser kingdom was coming after that one, that being Medo-Persia, according to **Daniel 8:20**, which arose in 539 B.C. and was represented by the chest and arms of silver in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Then, about 330 B.C., we see the rise of Greece. That's the third kingdom, according to **Daniel 8:21**. Then come legs of iron and the feet of iron clay, in 63 B.C., which was the Roman Empire, which was in power during the days of Jesus and was later divided into several parts. This was the last great kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's vision.

What was the point of all of this? What would happen after these kingdoms arose? Listen to Daniel: Those kingdoms' days were numbered.

Daniel 2:35 "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

Then look at verse 44.

Daniel 2:44 "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

When would the kingdom come? It would appear in the days of the Roman Empire. A kingdom that would never be destroyed would come during those days; a kingdom that would be superior to ALL other kingdoms.

Fast forward 600 years:

Hebrews 12:28 "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:"

That sounds familiar: a kingdom that will stand forever and not be destroyed. Here the writer says "*we receiving a kingdom...*" He didn't say, "One of these days, a kingdom will come." The saints THEN, to whom he was writing, were receiving a kingdom.

So, if the first century Christians were receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and Daniel says that the indestructible kingdom would come in the days of the kings leading up to the first century, the Roman Empire, can't we conclude that the kingdom came during the first century? We surely can.

Mark 9:1 "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."

When would it come? He says in the lifetime of some of those to whom Jesus was speaking. Not thousands of years later, but before some of them tasted of death. Some of them died before it came, but Jesus says some of them did not. They were still alive. That means it wasn't very far away.

So, when did it come? When was the kingdom established? Notice that Jesus said that it would come during their lifetime, and it would come with power. Do we ever read of any of these people to whom Jesus was speaking seeing power fall from heaven? Sure we do. Let's narrow it down. Just before ascending back to heaven, Jesus told His same disciples who were with him in **Mark 9:1** this:

Luke 24:49 "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

The "*promise*" that He spoke of refers to the Holy Spirit. We're getting closer.

Acts 1:8 "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you..."

Well, when did that happen? Go forward just a few days and one chapter.

Acts 2:1-4 "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it lay upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

There's the power that was brought by the Holy Spirit, fulfilling the promise of the Father. And what did Jesus say would come "*with power*": The kingdom. When did it come: on the day of Pentecost. When was that: in the first century, around the year A.D.33. What kingdom was in power at that time: Rome, Caesar; the fourth in this line of kingdoms of which Daniel spoke.

So, the Holy Spirit came with power upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Jesus told them that in their lifetime the kingdom would come with power. But someone says *that was the church that came there on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2--the church, not the kingdom*. Note the words of Jesus in this familiar passage:

Matthew 16:18-19 "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven..."

Yes, Jesus built His church and it came in the lifetime of His disciples. What do keys do: they let you inside. In other words, the church would be established and Peter would use the keys of entrance to the kingdom. (You see that *the church* and *the kingdom* are used interchangeably.) Isn't that exactly what happened on Pentecost? The church was established and Peter preached the first gospel sermon that resulted in more than 3,000 people being baptized into Christ, saved from their sins and added to the church. With that in mind, read what Paul wrote:

Colossians 1:12-14 "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness,

and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:"

That is exactly parallel with **Acts 2**. When they were made free from sin, they were translated into the kingdom. When they received the remission of their sins in **Acts 2**, the Lord added them to the church. You see, the kingdom came 2,000 years ago and you can be in it today. The doctrine of "dispensational premillennialism" is so popular, so widely embraced and so often taught by the televangelists of our day. But, friend, it is patently false. It misunderstands the very nature of the kingdom, just as the Jews of Jesus' own day misunderstood it. Even His disciples did not have a very clear understanding of the kingdom. Jesus said that His kingdom was "*not of this world*" (**John 18:36**). Well, if it's not like other kingdoms, what kind of kingdom is it? Where is it? How does it exist and how can I be a part of it? Lord willing, we'll take up those questions in our next study.