

# The Kingdom of God

## Introduction

The Kingdom of God is a very important subject in Scripture. John the Baptist proclaimed the fact of the imminent coming of the kingdom, and Jesus began his ministry by preaching on the subject of the kingdom. It is essential to have a good understanding of this subject in order to have an overall picture of what God has planned to do with his people. It is also the key to understanding the subject of the second coming, as it is the kingdom of God which Jesus will gather to himself at his return. The Christian can only profit from studying this important subject.

## Definition

A kingdom consists of a king, subjects, and a law for the subjects to follow. Basically the kingdom of God is the realm in which God's rule is recognised and obeyed, and his grace prevails. The terms, "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" mean the same thing, and are therefore interchangeable.

The term "Kingdom of God", is listed only four times in Matthew. The reason why Matthew avoided using the term is quite simple. Matthew was writing with a special focus toward the Jews. He knew as a Jew that the Jews feared using the name "God". Matthew preferred to use the term "Kingdom of heaven". In fact, he is the only Gospel writer to use that term. Mark and Luke, with their initial focus toward a different audience use the term "Kingdom of God" quite readily.

## The Kingdom of God Prophesied

King Nebuchadnezzar of the sixth century B.C. ruled over a very powerful empire - the Babylonian empire. Babylon itself was a large and very heavily fortified city. It had three walls, the outer wall was not only high, it was of such thickness that chariots could race three abreast along the top of the wall. King Nebuchadnezzar could perhaps be forgiven for thinking that his kingdom would last forever, however, in the second year of his reign, he is given a vision from God which so greatly troubles him that he is not able to sleep. Nebuchadnezzar declared that he would kill all the wise men of Babylon if they did not tell him the dream and its interpretation. After some anxious prayer on the part of Daniel, God revealed to him both the dream and the interpretation.

The image which stood before Nebuchadnezzar in the dream was that of a statue. Daniel was able to tell Nebuchadnezzar regarding the image, "The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing-floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth." (Daniel 2:32-35).

## The Interpretation

Nebuchadnezzar is being told through this dream of three empires which will arise after his empire, and also of a mysterious kingdom. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that the three empires which came into being after the Babylonian empire were:

1. The Mede and Persian  
Represented by the chest of silver.
2. The Greek  
Represented by the belly and thighs of bronze.
3. The Roman  
Represented by the feet of iron and clay.

God revealed to Daniel events which were hundreds of years into the future. Recorded history shows that events have unfolded exactly as predicted.

The Babylonians were conquered by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. They in turn were conquered by the Greeks under Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. Finally, the Roman army under General Sulla conquered Athens in 87 B.C. After the Roman empire, other empires arose. The Ottoman empire ruled the Middle East after the Roman empire. After the Ottoman Empire showed its might came the British Empire which was so vast that the British could boast, "The sun never sets on the British Empire". The British empire began to diminish quickly after the end of World War Two to be replaced by the economic, military and political might of the United States. The United States empire is one of political influence rather than of territorial control. It is a different type of empire to the others. God did not reveal to Daniel the empires which come after the Roman empire because they were of no importance in comparison to what God was going to do at the time of the Roman empire.

## The living stone

The object which occupied the mind of Nebuchadnezzar the most was the stone or rock. We note that it "...was cut out by no human hand..." signifying divine action. The fact that the stone represents none other than Jesus Christ himself is made clear from 1 Peter 2:4 "As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him." Daniel 2:35 states the fact that all who oppose the stone "...become like chaff on a threshing-floor..." This fact is stated again by Christ in referring to himself as the stone. He says, "He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." (Matt. 21:44).

In the prophecy we note that the stone does not hit the head of the statue, the chest, or the belly, but rather, the feet. So the prophecy is in effect saying, God will send Christ during the time of the Roman empire, and that He will establish a kingdom which will continue to grow until it fills the whole earth. "...But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth." (2:35). Unlike the kingdoms of men, it will endure for ever. "...the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor

will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever.” (2:44).

Immediately before the establishment of the kingdom of God. God raised up a prophet to prepare people for its coming. That prophet was John the Baptist who said, “...Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matt. 3:2).

### **The Kingdom At Hand**

John the Baptist also preached, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” (Mark 1:15). The kingdom of God came in the person of Jesus Christ who said: “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (Matt. 12:28). Christ’s healings, resurrections and exorcisms represent an invasion and preliminary overthrow by God’s kingdom of Satan’s kingdom which represents sickness and death (Matt. 4:23,12:28, Luke 10:18). Because of the triumph of the kingdom of God, Jesus is able to speak of Satan falling from his previous position of power. ““And he said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’” (Luke 10:18). Satan is also spoken of as being bound for a time (Revelation 20:2).

### **Entry to the Kingdom of God**

Because all of mankind has sinned against God, no person is worthy of entrance into the kingdom of God. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23). We can only enter the kingdom of God through the work of Jesus Christ. Through his righteousness, his suffering and dying, his resurrection and ascension. Jesus Christ is the doorway to the kingdom, we can only enter through him. Because we enter the kingdom through the work of another, and not our own, we must enter the kingdom with true humility and thankfulness. Jesus therefore says, “...anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Mark 10:15).

### **Spiritual rebirth**

“...unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3). When a baby is born into the world, he or she is born spiritually dead. This is because Adam and Eve who were initially spiritually alive to God, rebelled against him. They broke the command of God not to eat from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”, the result of this being that they died spiritually. The spiritual link with God was broken because God can not tolerate sin. In addition to spiritual death, they also began to die physically. God had warned that they would die if they rebelled against his command which was, “...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (Genesis 3:17).

God can not receive the spiritually dead into his kingdom, a person must be born again spiritually. The spiritual rebirth for the believer before the saving work of Christ was different to what the believer receives after his saving work (post Pentecost).

Firstly, the Old Testament saints were born again and displayed a faith in God - the fruit of their rebirth. Jesus shows surprise that Nicodemus, a teacher, did not understand the necessity of being ‘born anew’ (John 3:3). ““You are Israel’s teacher,’ said Jesus, ‘and do you not understand these

things?’” (John 3:10). As for the difference between the two groups, the Old Testament saints did not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them permanently. The lives of the disciples show the difference. Before Pentecost they were men with a weak faith. After Pentecost (Acts chapter two), their faith was much stronger as shown by their boldness. Jesus had earlier explained to the disciples that the Holy Spirit whom he describes at this point as the ‘Spirit of truth’ as being with them, but later He will be within them. “... you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:17). The main point I want to make is that all believers (pre and post Pentecost) must be born again to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The spiritually dead do not enter.

Some other aspects of entry to the kingdom are:

To enter the kingdom of God is to be transferred from one kingdom to another. “He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” (Colossians 1:13).

Men are determined to enter it (Luke 16:16).

Riches are a hindrance to entry (Mark 10:23).

Sinners go in before the self-righteous (Matt. 21:31).

The self-righteous religious leaders hinder entrance (Matt. 23:13).

### **Growth of the Kingdom**

The kingdom of God began with just one person, Jesus Christ, called ‘the stone’ or ‘rock’ (Daniel 2:35). He is the only one truly worthy to enter. Others enter through faith in Christ as a gift from God. As people continue to enter the kingdom, the kingdom grows. The prophet Daniel spoke of this growth, “...But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.” (2:35).

Jesus said, “...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matt. 16:18). Also in regard to the growth of the kingdom, Jesus said, “...What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.” (Mark 4:30-32).

It is like the growth of leaven (yeast) (Matt. 13:33).

It is like the growth of wheat (Matt. 13:24-26).

### **Value of the Kingdom**

In the time of Jesus, it was not easy for a person to secure his valuables. Some hid their treasure in the ground. If the treasure was lost, it became the possession of the next person who bought the field. Jesus likened the kingdom of God to hidden treasure worth selling everything to obtain when he said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” (Matt. 13:44). Jesus further emphasised the point by saying, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” (Matt. 13:45-46).

Jesus informed people they should eagerly seek after the kingdom and not fret over the things of this world. “But seek

first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matt. 6:33-34).

### **Nature of the Kingdom**

The Kingdom of God is not a political kingdom, living in physical conflict with other kingdoms or powers. When explaining this point to Pilate, Jesus said, “... My kingdom is not of this world...” (John 18:36). It is not as earthly kingdoms which conquer a percentage of the earth and have boundaries. Nor is there any suggestion in Scripture that it will ever do so. Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the Kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21). It grows together with the kingdom of darkness till judgment day (Matt. 13:30, 40-41).

The immoral and worldly will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 5:5. “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” (Romans 14:17).

“I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” (1 Corinthians 15:50). See also Colossians 1:12-13, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 2 Thess. 1:5, Heb. 1:8, 12:28, James 2:5, Rev. 1:6, 9).

### **The King**

The kingdom of God has a king; and the king is Jesus Christ. Pilate acknowledged his kingship. “‘You are a king then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king.’” (John 18:37). “Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” (John 19:19). See also Matt. 27:11,28,37, Mark 15:26,32, Luke 23:38.

### **The Subjects**

Christians are the real Jews over whom Jesus is king. The apostle Paul explains, a person must be a Jew inwardly (spiritually), and be circumcised spiritually in order to be a true Jew in God's sight. “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly...” (Romans 2:28-29). Many blessings flow to the spiritual Jews who live under his reign.

As to the length of his reign we read “...and he shall reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15). The coming of Jesus is the fulfilment of God's oath to David that he would put one of his descendants on the throne (Luke 1:32). From that throne Jesus Christ rules over the kingdom of God.

### **The Coming of the Kingdom of God with Power**

The resurrection, the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, is the coming of the Kingdom of God with power. When Christ came to earth in his body of humiliation, i.e. the flesh, it was the coming of the kingdom of God in weakness. Jesus foretold of his spiritual coming to his people, which will be a coming in power. He said, “... there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” (Mark 9:1).

The meaning of this statement is made clear from another statement. “...there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (Matt. 16:28). Please note that the Son of Man is here coming *in* his kingdom, not *for* his kingdom. This clearly refers to the resurrection of Christ and his spiritual presence in the kingdom. Jesus said, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:18) See also 14:23.

Christ reigns now in his kingdom. His goal is to ultimately conquer all the enemies of God (put them under his feet) then hand the victorious kingdom over to the Father. As the Scripture says, “‘For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he ‘has put everything under his feet.’ Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:22-28).

All Christians are in the Kingdom of God now, to trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and saviour is to enter the kingdom. The kingdom has no national barriers, it has filled the whole earth as prophesied in Daniel. At the moment the kingdom is invisible; one day, at the coming of Christ, the subjects of the kingdom will be gathered together and the kingdom will be made manifest.

### **It is Prayerfully Sought After**

Christians are to pray for the future manifestation of the kingdom as taught in our Lord's prayer, “Thy kingdom come...” (Matt. 6:10). There will be signs that the future aspect of the kingdom is near. Jesus said, “There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.” (Luke 21:31). We are heirs of the future aspect of the kingdom (James 2:5). An everlasting kingdom (2 Peter 1:11).

### **The End of the Age Brings Judgement**

Scripture mentions just two ages, this age, and the age to come. At the end of this age the wicked go to their punishment. “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:47-50).

The end of the wicked upon the earth will come quickly as Jesus will send out his angels to destroy the wicked. “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.” (Matt. 13:40-43).

When Christ returns, he will come in great power to

judge, and to take out of his kingdom all evil doers. "Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters. First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." (Matt. 13:30).

### **The keys to the kingdom**

When Jesus asked the disciples who they believed him to be, "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'" (Matt. 16:16-19).

A literal translation of the Greek text says "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatever you bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven. And whatever you may loose on the earth shall be, having been loosed in heaven." (Matt. 16:19).<sup>1</sup>

There is a big difference between the disciples acting according the pattern of heaven, and heaven acting according to the dictates of the disciples. Peter was given a major role in the early Church. He proclaimed the gospel to his fellow Jews immediately after the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples (Acts chapter 2). It is only after Peter arrives with John that the Samaritans receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8: 14-17). It is Peter who plays a key role when the baptism of the Holy Spirit goes to the Gentiles a little later (Acts 10:44-48). The above is Peter's main role in the early Church. His part is not one of hierarchal leadership where the other apostles need to submit their plans or teachings to him for approval.

Others also play a significant role in the early Church. For instance, it is Paul who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens more words in the New Testament than any other writer including Peter. Paul has to correct Peter on one occasion (Galatians 2:11-16). Furthermore, it is James who takes up a leadership role in the Church (Galatians 2:9. Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18).

### **The Final Victory**

Jesus Christ will return to the earth with awesome power, and all evil will be finally and completely dealt with as shown above. His coming will bring about a final and continuing victory for the kingdom of God. All who love the Lord Jesus look forward to his second coming. "...Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). "...there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.'" (Revelation 11:15).

### **Teaching**

Finally, I come back to the importance of this subject as we can observe from the teaching ministry of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus gave some teaching on the kingdom after his resurrection from the dead. "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days

and spoke about the kingdom of God." (Acts 1:3).

The kingdom of God is part of the good news (gospel) message which the apostles proclaim to sinners. "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." (Acts 8:12).

In another instance, Paul took up the subject of the kingdom of God when he went to Ephesus. "Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God." (Acts 19:8). See also Acts 20:25. 28:23, 31.

### **Work**

Read through Daniel chapter two.

### **Recommended Reading**

Michael Lawson      "*The Unfolding Kingdom*"  
Graeme Goldsworthy      "*Gospel and Kingdom*"  
Donald Palmer      "*The Kingdom of God*"

### **Questions**

1. Who was the king who was troubled by a dream of a large statue?
2. Who is the stone in this dream?
3. Into which empire did the stone come?
4. When was the kingdom of God established?
5. How does a person enter the kingdom of God?
6. What is the duration of the kingdom of God?
7. Who is the king?
8. When will Christ "weed out of his kingdom" all who do evil?

### **Answers**

1. Nebuchadnezzar
2. Jesus Christ
3. Roman
4. On the day of Pentecost, after the death and resurrection of Christ.
5. Through faith in Jesus Christ.
6. It will continue forever.
7. Jesus Christ.
8. At the close of this age.

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