

CHRIST'S COMING KINGDOM

A Survey of Bible Teaching about the Kingdom

by

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Preface

In Christian circles it is common to read or hear that we are “building the kingdom” or that “the kingdom is spreading.” Many missionaries consider that they are “carrying God’s kingdom to the corners of the earth.” Entire Christian denominations are convinced that they are that kingdom. Others believe that the kingdom is heaven. None of these concepts—nor even the language—is biblical.

Certainly the New Testament speaks often of “the kingdom (of God).” What is it? As a seminary student in the mid-1950s, I was confused by many schemes to define that kingdom. For my thesis I studied its meaning in the Gospel of Matthew—and discovered a simple meaning that fits there and everywhere else. My good friend Stanley D. Toussaint, later head of the Bible department, gave me strong support. And when he wrote his doctoral dissertation (later revised and published) on that Gospel, he presented the same basic conclusion. Before long, Alva J. McClain supported us in his masterpiece, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Zondervan, 1959). It was the same approach George N. H. Peters had taken in 1883 in his mammoth work, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ* (three volumes republished by Kregel in 1957).

McClain points out that we must distinguish two kingdoms of God in the Bible: (1) His “universal kingdom,” which always exists everywhere, is ruled from heaven, and has no changing history. (2) His “mediatorial kingdom,” which is localized in time and place and ruled by God’s representative. The latter is the main subject of Bible history and prophecy—and of this course. It is the kingdom that drew near during Jesus’ ministry. The New Testament often refers to it, calling it “the kingdom,” “the kingdom of God,” and (only in Matthew) “the kingdom of heaven.”

This mediatorial kingdom is spiritual in its essence. Yet, it will have all the aspects predicted by the prophets, including material and political aspects. As every disciple recognizes, Jesus is its appointed Ruler (the *Christ*). Yet, He has not begun the predicted rule. It drew near but did not begin. It is still future. This course is designed to show how this simple perspective fits the Scriptures.

My son James Bradley Hepp has encouraged me to prepare a version of this course for the internet, and is helping in that process. My website is kingdominbible.com.

John Hepp, Jr.

GOALS

The entire Bible prepares us for Christ's coming kingdom on earth—the grand climax in which all of God's people will participate. The main goal for this course is to provide you a simple biblical perspective about that kingdom—one that agrees with all the relevant Scriptures in their normal meanings. You will look in all parts of the Bible, not merely at descriptions of the future. You will see that Christ's predicted kingdom

- had a past history in God's rule over the nation Israel
- was offered by the Lord Jesus and His apostles but rejected by Israel
- will be established, just as promised, when the Lord returns.

ABBREVIATIONS

ch.(chs.)	chapter(s)	NT	New Testament
etc.	and so forth	OT	Old Testament
i.e.	that is	p.(pp.)	page(s)
KJV	King James Version of the Bible	v.(vv.)	verse(s)
NASB	New American Standard Bible	√	shows a question that is part of basis for examination
NIV	New International Version of the Bible		

BIBLE BOOK ABBREVIATIONS

Gen.	2 Kings	Isa.	Nah.	Rom.	Titus
Exod.	1 Chron.	Jer.	Hab.	1 Cor.	Philem.
Lev.	2 Chron.	Lam.	Zeph.	2 Cor.	Heb.
Num.	Ezra	Ezek.	Hag.	Gal.	James
Deut.	Neh.	Dan.	Zech.	Eph.	1 Peter
Josh.	Esth.	Hos.	Mal.	Phil.	2 Peter
Judg.	Job	Joel	Matt.	Col.	1 John
Ruth	Ps. (Pss.)	Amos	Mark	1 Thess.	2 John
1 Sam.	Prov.	Obad.	Luke	2 Thess.	3 John
2 Sam.	Eccl.	Jonah	John	1 Tim.	Jude
1 Kings	S. of Sol.	Mic.	Acts	2 Tim.	Rev.

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS

Welcome to this course on the “basic theme of the Bible.” In it you will survey and understand many of the Bible teachings about God’s kingdom. For summary statements of course contents, see Preface and Goals.

MATERIALS

This study guide and your Bible are all you need. The study guide will lead you a step at a time. If possible, use a modern translation of the Bible. This study is based on the New International Version.

UNITS AND LESSONS

The course has thirteen lessons organized into four units. Each unit has its own examination. Look now at the list of contents to see what is included in each unit. Each lesson centers on some aspect of kingdom teaching, assigning you Bible studies and providing explanations and questions. In general, the order of the lessons follows the same order the Bible follows. Under each lesson title you will first read the lesson objectives in question form.

QUESTIONS

The questions in the lessons are designed to help you learn—not to test you. Some of them are checked (✓), indicating that they deal with the main objectives for their lessons. Checked questions will serve as basis for the unit examinations. Nearly all questions are answered in Answers, beginning on page 57. You should keep your own answers to help study for your unit examinations.

EXAMINATIONS

You will be instructed when to take each of the four unit examinations, which are based on the checked (✓) questions. While taking examinations, you must not look up answers. In the printed form of this course, there is room on the examination pages for you to write all the answers.

Now, with prayer to the Creator to whom the kingdom belongs,
begin with Lesson 1.

Unit One

Lesson 1

Creation and Re-Creation

Have you read Important Instructions?

*What were God's main purposes in making (a) the creation?
(b) man? In relation to His rule what two goals will He reach?
What name does Hebrews 2 call the coming time of glory?*

In this lesson you will consider (a) the importance of the kingdom and (b) God's purpose in creation and re-creation. By "re-creation" we refer to the biblical story of salvation. It is the process, after man's fall, by which God will attain His original goals for creation.

Importance of the Kingdom

According to Erich Sauer, "The 'Kingdom' is the real basic theme of the Bible." George N. H. Peters agrees: "The kingdom deserves the first place in Biblical and the first rank in Systematic theology....In view of its extent, the doctrine exceeds all others in magnitude, enfolding in itself nearly all doctrine."¹

The Lord Jesus went about "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1). And He commanded His apostles to do the same. Every serious Bible student must sooner or later try to determine what kingdom they meant.² In this course we deal with that important question and show how that kingdom is the theme of the Bible.

Old Testament Essential. To correctly understand the kingdom, we must begin with the Old Testament, which speaks about it often. And we must interpret Old Testament statements in a normal way. Taking Old Testament history and prophecies at face value yields a meaning for the kingdom which the New Testament does not change. Some may object to this statement, saying, "Doesn't the New Testament furnish the key to understanding the Old Testament?" Sometimes it does, but it never changes basic definitions established in the Old Testament without clearly so indicating.

The Gospels constantly speak of the kingdom but never define it. Neither do other New Testament books (even Luke 17:21, John 18:36, or Rom. 14:17, as we shall see). They assume that the subject is already well-known. And why not? For the Old Testament itself was well-known, being the textbook not only for the synagogue but also for the church in its evangelizing. In fact,

¹ George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1957), I:31.

² Ask the average churchgoer what the kingdom is. Some common answers are "heaven" or "the church," both unbiblical answers.

every New Testament book presupposes a knowledge of the Old Testament, and therefore of the kingdom it presents.

Nowadays, however, many fail to know or believe the Old Testament and give it proper weight. This has led to twisted views of the kingdom. For example, many mishandle the New Testament emphasis on the spiritual requirements for entering the kingdom. They wrongly conclude that the kingdom itself is “spiritual” in the sense of non-political and non-material. Here is a typical statement of that mistaken belief.

The kingdom of God means the reign and rule of God in the hearts of people. It is spiritual in nature, not military and political. It is within the lives of those who accept Jesus as their King. When Jesus told the Pharisees, “The kingdom is within you,” He was saying that in His coming God’s perfect rule was being made manifest, and in those who accept Him God’s kingdom had already come.

Apparently, no Christian teacher in the first two centuries came to such a conclusion. They all looked forward to a kingdom on earth that would combine political, material, and spiritual factors in one grand climax.

No Present Form of the Kingdom. In this course we affirm that even though the kingdom is the goal of all Christian activities, there is no present form of it. This doesn’t belittle the importance of the present but properly relates the present to the objectives God is moving toward. Should it surprise us to be reminded that this world is passing away and that our “life” is hidden in heaven, to be revealed when the Lord comes back to reign? God’s interest in the future should be our interest.

In spite of the great emphasis God has given to prophecy, some of God’s servants consider its study a waste of time. Perhaps one reason for their attitude is their faulty view of the kingdom. Since they think the kingdom has already come, many prophecies become meaningless or confusing to them. This course will correct that defect by showing you a consistent meaning in both Testaments. It will make the coming kingdom of Christ—and the prophecies about it—assume its true importance in your thinking.

Now answer the following questions, some of them based on what you have just read. Check your answers in the “Answers” section (p. 57).

Questions to Answer

1. According to George N. H. Peters, why does the kingdom deserve much attention?
2. The importance of the kingdom is emphasized by the references to it in the Gospels. Who often referred to the kingdom in their preaching?

3.
 - a. The New Testament nowhere clearly defines the kingdom. What does this fact indicate about the people who heard the early preaching and those who later read the New Testament Scriptures?
 - b. Where must we begin if we want to correctly understand the kingdom?
4. What are three kinds of characteristics the kingdom will combine?
5. Read aloud Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 to picture in your mind the majesty of God's creative activity. Notice that the climax of creation was in making man ("in our image," God said).
 - a.√ What was His purpose for man?
 - b. Read Psalm 8. Which verse best reflects this same purpose?
6. Look up Hebrews 2, which interprets the verse just mentioned from Psalm 8.
 - a.√ The author of Hebrews in 1:14 has referred to our future salvation by name. In 2:3–4 he identifies this as the "great salvation" the Lord and His apostles spoke about. We need not wonder what "salvation" he means. In 2:5 he refers to it again ("about which we are speaking") and calls it by a different name. What name?
 - b. In 2:5–8 by quoting from Psalm 8 he proves that not angels but man will rule in the world to come. What does he teach about the fulfillment of Psalm 8:6?
 - c. Only one man has been "crowned with glory" so far. Who is that?
 - d. How is God's purpose for men (those who are "sons") described in 2:10?
 - e. How is God's purpose for redeemed men described in Revelation 5:9–10?

The Purpose of Creation

God is far greater than the creation He has made. Yet, this immense God is spirit, invisible to human eyes. He can be seen only in His deeds. He made all of creation to demonstrate His character. The basic issue in this world is "morality," that is, God's righteousness.

God is immense; the earth seems insignificant by comparison. Yet, God has revealed a marvelous plan for this tiny earth and its inhabitants. He has made it the jewel of the universe, the center stage on which to demonstrate His character. He will fill the whole earth with His righteousness (Isa. 11:4, 5, 9). Right will prove to be might.

Two Goals. God's plan for earth cannot fail, since He is both the Author and the Achiever of the plan. Specifically, He will accomplish these two goals:

1. He will some day place His throne upon earth, among men, and will rule the universe from earth. (See Rev. 21:1–3 and 22:1–3.)
2. He will enable men to share His rule with Him. (See Rev. 22:5; 1 Cor. 6:2.)

The Bible reveals that these two goals will be accomplished in the coming kingdom of Christ. It also reveals some of God’s plans and progress toward those goals, that is, toward that kingdom. In fact, the Bible is the only source of accurate information about the kingdom.

To understand how God is preparing for the kingdom, we must first understand His promise to Abraham, also called the Abrahamic Covenant. This promise, which can be called “the backbone of the Bible,” will be the subject for our next study.

More Questions

- 7.√ a. Why did God make the creation?
 b. What two goals will He reach, in relation to His rule?
 c. Look again at Hebrews 2:5–8. Commenting on Psalm 8, this passage says that Jesus is crowned with glory that He will share with many others. What does it call that time of glory?
 NOTE: As you saw earlier, the passage identifies this with the “great salvation” the Lord and His apostles spoke about.

Lesson 2 “His Promise to Abraham”

In relation to the Abrahamic Covenant, what are (a) its key passage? (b) its three circles of blessings? (c) its consummation? (d) references to it in Hebrews 6:12–20? (e) two words there that summarize its promises?

In this lesson you will consider God’s method for bringing His kingdom, using Abraham as His channel. Hebrews 6:13–14 calls this “His promise to Abraham.” This promise is so important that it can be called “the backbone of the Bible.” In the Old Testament passages and in our discussion, you will read the title “*the LORD*.” Notice that L is a capital letter and ORD are small capital letters. This represents God’s covenant name *Yahweh* in the Old Testament.

Questions to Answer

1. Look through Genesis 2–11. After the creation, what are three other main events these chapters tell about?
2. The basic passage for the Abrahamic Covenant is Genesis 12:1–3. Read it.
 - a. List seven promises to Abraham as given here.
 - b. Find the repetition of the covenant in Genesis 22. What two promises are emphasized?

3. To whom did the LORD repeat this covenant in
 - a. Genesis 26:1–5?
 - b. Genesis 28:13–15?
4. Find a verse in Galatians 3 showing that even believing Gentiles are heirs of Abraham’s promise.

The Promise to Abraham Emphasized

The promise to Abraham is emphasized by two things: its position in Genesis and its prominence throughout the Bible.

Its position in Genesis. That position is, first and foremost, at 12:1–3. It is at the head of the story of Abraham and his descendants, which story continues on through Genesis and the whole Bible. The previous chapters, that is, Genesis 1–11, are markedly different from those that follow. Chapters 1–11 take giant strides through many centuries, centering mainly on the creation, the fall, the flood, and the rebellion and judgment at Babel. In fact, they give so few details about so few events that they are clearly an introduction to the story of the promise, which begins in chapter 12. They are a prelude to the symphony of the family of faith, the family of the promise.

Its Prominence throughout the Bible. The promise to Abraham is repeated and alluded to, not only in Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch, but even into the New Testament.³ Even gentile believers today, because of their relation to Abraham through Christ, are heirs of the same promise: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).

In fact, all the other promises—and even the events—of the Bible are related to the promise to Abraham.

The Promise to Abraham Explained

The promise to Abraham is explained in various ways in the Bible. Consider the explanations in Genesis 12:1–3 and Hebrews 6:13–14.

³ Here are many of the Bible passages that clearly refer to the Abrahamic Covenant (less clearly if within parentheses). Genesis 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17; chapter 15; chapter 17; 18:18–19; 21:10–12; 22:15–18; 26:2–5, 24; 28:3–4, 11–15; 32:12; 35:11–12; 48:4; 50:24–25; Exodus 2:24; 6:4–8; 13:5, 11; 32:13; 33:1–3; Leviticus 26:40–45; Numbers 14:16; 32:11; Deuteronomy 1:8, 35; 6:10, 23; 7:8, 12; 8:1, 18; 9:5; 10:11; 26:3; 30:20; 31:7; 34:4 (up to here the Deut. passages refer to the land the LORD swore to give); 4:29–31; 7:12–16; 13:17–18; 29:10–13; 30:1–10; Joshua 5:6; Judges 2:1; 2 Kings 13:23; 1 Chronicles 16:15–18; Psalms 105:8–11, 42–45, (111:5–6); Isaiah (41:8); Micah 7:20; Matthew (1:1; 8:11; 22:32); Luke 1:54–55, 72–74; (13:28); Acts 3:25–26; 7:17; Romans 4:11–18; (11:16–24); Galatians 3:7–9, 14, 16, 29; Hebrews 2:16; 6:12–18; 7:6; (9:15; 10:36; 11:9–10); 11:13, 17, 39. In addition to these passages, there are many others—such as, 2 Chronicles 6:33, Psalm 22:27, and Isaiah 49:6—that speak of the nations coming to know God. Such passages are also based on the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Key Passage Is Genesis 12:1–3. Read it again. Here the promise is seen to consist of God’s blessings that are (1) personal—for Abraham himself, (2) national—for Abraham’s nation Israel, and (3) international—for all believers.⁴

Think of these three spheres of blessings as concentric circles, with Abraham as the center circle. God’s blessings promised for each circle are felt in the other circles as well; they are overlapping. For example, Abraham himself is to be a blessing. To whom? Both to the national sphere and to the international. And Abraham blesses each sphere through the other, that is, other believers through his own nation and his own nation through other believers.

Another Passage Is Hebrews 6:12–20. This also explains the promise to Abraham. Read it. What did God promise? Quoting from Genesis 22, this passage boils the promise down to its rich essence: (1) God’s blessing and (2) God’s multiplication (vv. 13–14). These are easily seen in the KJV’s literal translation: “Surely blessing I will **ble**ss thee, and multiplying I will **multi**ply thee” (emphasis added). It is impossible for the human imagination to stretch enough to take this in. It means that the heirs of Abraham, when fully blessed and multiplied by God, will receive nothing less than His kingdom.

Hebrews 6 goes on to explain why God “swore by himself” (vv. 13, 17) when He repeated this promise to Abraham. It was so that “**we** who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us **may be greatly encouraged**” (v. 18, emphasis added). It is clear that we believers in the church, not just Abraham and his nation, are “heirs of what was promised” (v. 17). What God promised—with His oath—to Abraham is what we will certainly get.

The Promise to Abraham Effected

The promise to Abraham is accomplished in three stages: partly in the past and the present, but mostly in the future.

Effected In the Past. God’s covenant grace and power was seen in events such as (1) the miraculous births of Isaac and of Jacob; (2) their multiplication into twelve tribes, which were preserved in Egypt, delivered from there, and constituted as a nation under God; and (3) His varied dealings with that nation until (4) the coming of the promised Heir and Ruler.

Effected In the Present. God has grafted us Gentiles into the tree of promise (Rom. 11), greatly expanding the outreach of His covenant.

Effected In the Future. The grandest fulfillment of the promise to Abraham will be when the chief Heir and Ruler comes again to set up His eternal kingdom. Every true believer, whether he

⁴ In the original Hebrew Genesis 12:1–3 has two commands, each followed by three promises. The first command, a double one, is in verse 1 (“leave...and go...”). This is followed in verse 2 by the first three promises. These lead to the second command at the end of verse 2 (“Be a blessing”), then three more promises in verse 3.

understands it or not, awaits that glorious consummation, that kingdom of God's full blessing and multiplication.

More Questions

- 5.√ What is the key passage for (and the first mention of) the Abrahamic Covenant?
- 6.√ What three circles (spheres) of blessings does this covenant reach?
7. Find the references to the Abrahamic Covenant in Hebrews 6:12–20.
 - a.√ What two words can summarize its promises, as quoted there by the KJV?
 - b. Who are its heirs?
8. Effecting the Abrahamic Covenant
 - a. List three examples of ways God partly fulfilled this covenant in times past (showing His covenant grace and power in Abraham's family).
 - b.√ What will be the consummation (complete fulfillment) of the covenant?

Lesson 3 God's "Former Dominion" (A)

The "former dominion": (a) what was it? (b) when did it begin? (c) what passage says it will be restored? (d) what was the tabernacle for? (e) where were God's two thrones? (f) what was God's threefold purpose for Israel? (g) what figure in Isaiah summarizes this purpose?

In this lesson and the next you will consider the history and characteristics of God's past kingdom over Israel. That kingdom was called "the former dominion" in Micah 4:8.

Questions to Answer

1. Read Psalm 103, which tells about God's universal kingdom, a kingdom without limits of time or space. Where is His throne for this kingdom?
2. Read Exodus 19:1–6, which includes the LORD's first message for Israel in the desert at Mt. Sinai. He had brought Israel out of Egypt and to Himself. What threefold purpose did He announce for Israel?
- 3.√ Read Exodus 25:8, 21–22, part of the LORD's instructions about building the tabernacle (a portable tent).
 - a. What was the purpose for the tabernacle?

- b. Where would He sit in order to give Israel His laws? (In other words, where was His throne as Israel's King)?
4. Read Exodus 40:33–38. What happened to the tabernacle after Moses set it up?
5. Looking back at this occasion, Psalm 114:1–2 says: "When Israel came out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion." Use a synonym to tell what began at Mt. Sinai.

The Former Dominion: Introduction

Many prophetic passages describe that future kingdom in which the promise to Abraham will finally be fulfilled. Look at Micah 4:1–8, for example. This prophecy describes it as a glorious kingdom of God in the last days, in which God will reign from His exalted capital in Jerusalem, with all the nations submissive. After so many centuries of being bruised and scarred, this earth will learn truth and justice, and will rest in peace and security. Of course, no such kingdom of God exists on earth now.

That same predictive passage in Micah calls the future kingdom by another name. Addressing the "tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion," the LORD promises, "To you it will come—even the former dominion will come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem" (Micah 4:8, NASB). Thus, the kingdom that is to come to Jerusalem and bless the whole earth is identified as "the former dominion...the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem." This agrees with the LORD's promise to David that his kingdom, which was centered in Jerusalem, will last forever (2 Sam. 7:13).

In other words, the future kingdom, in which God will fulfill the promises to Abraham, will not really be new. It existed at Jerusalem before. Therefore, the student of prophecy must also be a student of history. By learning what the kingdom was like before, he can better understand what it will be like when it is restored.

The Place of the Former Dominion

It is essential to distinguish the former dominion from God's rule over the whole universe. During Old Testament times the one true God had two thrones: one in heaven and the other on earth. The two thrones were not the same.

God Had a Throne in Heaven. From that throne He has always ruled over the universe (as seen in Psalm 103:19; 145:10–13). That throne and rule have never been altered by changes in time and space. His universal kingdom already existed before the world began and has never been interrupted. Even when God abandoned His throne on earth—thereby suspending His "earthly" kingdom—He still continued in full charge from His throne in heaven. This is the lesson He taught powerful gentile rulers such as Nebuchadnezzar (see Dan. 4:3, 11–17, 34–37) and Darius (see Dan. 6:26–27).

It is clear that the heavenly throne and universal kingdom never ceased. Therefore, when Micah 4:8 said that "the former dominion" would return, it could not mean God's universal kingdom. What never left could hardly return.

God Also Had a Throne on Earth. That throne was established at the Exodus. It was "the ark of the Testimony" (Exod. 25:8, 21–22; 29:42–46; 40:33–38), from which He met with Israel's representatives and issued His laws. Thus, God's kingdom on earth began in the desert at Mt. Sinai, where He commanded that the ark be built, and the tabernacle to shelter it. Accordingly, it says in Psalm 114:1–2 that "when Israel came out of Egypt...Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion" (cf. Jer. 2:2–3; Deut. 33:2–5). In Samuel's time, because they "rejected [the LORD] as their king," Israel demanded a human king (1 Sam. 8:5–7). The LORD let them have their wish. From that time each one anointed to rule sat on a public throne as the LORD's representative. But that throne was only an extension of the real one: "The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him" (Hab. 2:20; see Isa. 6:1–4).

Across the centuries, the godly in Israel recognized both parts of God's rule, from heaven and on earth. For examples, see Judges 8:22–23; 2 Samuel 6:2; 1 Chronicles 28:1–8; and 2 Chronicles 6:16, 21. Of the rule from heaven, King David spoke of God's "glory...majesty...splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom, you are exalted as head over all...all things" (1 Chron. 29:11–12). Of the rule on earth, David said, "the LORD...has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel" (1 Chron. 28:5). This is the throne of the former dominion, which was finally taken away but will some day be restored.

The Purpose of the Former Dominion

The purpose of the former dominion was announced by God Himself (in Exod. 19:1–6), on the eve of its inception at Sinai. Israel was to be three things:

- "My own possession among all the peoples" (NASB), that is, God's own inheritance and delight
- "A kingdom of priests," that is, a kingdom serving as God's means to bring other nations to Himself
- "A holy nation," that is, God's concrete demonstration to the universe of His own character

The prophet Isaiah later had a lot to say about God's purposes for Israel in this world. Israel was set in opposition to Babylon, which sums up the spirit of rebellion (Isa. 47) and which took Israel captive. But Israel was designed to be God's servant to bring God's righteousness and salvation (see especially Isa. 41, 42, 49).

It is evident that these purposes were only partially accomplished under the former dominion.

More Questions

- 6.√ The future kingdom is identified as a kingdom that existed previously, "the former dominion."
- What book and chapter so identifies it?
 - What was the former dominion?
 - When did it begin?
- 7.√ Where were God's two thrones as long as the former dominion continued?
- 8.√ God had a majestic threefold purpose for Israel as His kingdom.
- In two or three words each, state each of these three aspects.
 - What figure in Isaiah summarizes all of these aspects?

Lesson 4
God's "Former Dominion" (B)

*The former dominion past and future: (a) what were three aspects of its glory? (b) how will these be transformed? (c) what covenant was its basis? (d) what covenant **will be** its basis? (e) when was it suspended?*

In this lesson you will continue to consider the history and characteristics of God's past kingdom over Israel, and how it will be changed.

Questions to Answer

- In the previous lesson you saw one of the glories of the former dominion, on the day the tabernacle was first set up. What was it?
 - What other glory did Israel have, according to Deuteronomy 4:8?
 - One office in Israel had a special glory and clothing to symbolize that glory. What was it? (See Exod. 28:1–2.)
- Hosea 3:4–5 is one of many prophecies that looked forward to (a) the end of God's former dominion and yet to (b) its future restoration. By what expression does it refer to the period of time between a and b?
- Ezekiel 10:4, 18, 19 was part of a vision by Ezekiel, who lived when the kingdom came to an end. What did he see departing from the temple and the capital city?

The Glory of the Former Dominion

The glory of the former dominion consisted in part of these three realities: (a) God's presence, (b) God's precepts, and (c) God's priests.

God's Glorious Presence. This was evident in such things as (1) the miraculous signs performed at the Exodus, (2) the angelic manifestations at Mt. Sinai, (3) the glory on Moses' face, (4) the cloud of light that filled the tabernacle (and later the temple) and guided Israel in her wanderings, and (5) God's many answers and activities for men like David and Hezekiah and the prophets. The symbol of God's glorious presence (i. e., the cloud of light) stayed until Ezekiel saw it depart just before the destruction of Jerusalem.

God's Glorious Precepts. These were the most perfect laws any nation has ever received. They were summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20) and to a certain extent in the seventy laws listed in Exodus 21–23. After being duly recorded in a book, they were subscribed to by the people in a solemn ceremony. This ceremony included the sprinkling of blood from animal sacrifices (Exod. 24). Coming, as they did, from God Himself, the sole Legislator in Israel, these precepts were perfect for their time and place. And they revealed to Israel—and through Israel to other nations—what true righteousness is.

God's Glorious Priests. These maintained the covenant relation by bringing the prescribed sacrifices and offerings in the prescribed manner. The priestly manual for maintaining the covenant was the Book of Leviticus. Because of the priests, the holy God could rule in the midst of a sinful people (Heb. 7:11).

The History of the Former Dominion

Most of the Old Testament tells the history of God's kingdom in Israel. A number of books and prophecies center on its suspension.

The History of the Former Dominion. This is told from Exodus through 2 Chronicles. This begins, of course, with its constitution, the Old Covenant, made at Mt. Sinai.⁵ It includes the period of rebellion in the desert, the conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua, the cycles of apostasy and restoration under the judges, the establishment of the monarchy under Saul and its high point under David and Solomon, and finally its decline and suspension.

The Suspension of the Former Dominion. This was foreseen from the beginning and foretold by God through Moses (see Deut. 31:14–22; 31:30—32:23; 32:36–43). The prophets were sent, some to check the wild rush of apostasy by miracle ministries (such as those of Elijah and Elisha) and some to announce the dissolving of God's kingdom (see Hos. 3:4–5; Amos 9:1–8; Ezek. 21:25–27; all of Jeremiah).

⁵ The covenant made at Sinai is sometimes called "the law." Galatians 3:17 so refers to it in contrast to the covenant made with Abraham. It is called "old" (Heb. 8:6) or "first" (Heb. 8:7, 13; 9:1, 15, 16) in contrast to the New Covenant (Heb. 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24), which is eternal (Heb. 13:20).

The tragic climax was the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (described in 2 Kings 25, 2 Chron. 36, Jer. 39 and 52, and Lamentations). From then on, the sovereignty over God's people was mediated through the Gentiles.

The Transformation of the Former Dominion

As seen before, the kingdom that was suspended is the same one that will be restored. This is why the disciples could ask, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). But when restored it will be far superior to what it was, both in extent and in quality. Consider, for example, the aspects we saw when considering its "glory."

God's Glorious Presence. Under the Old Covenant His full presence was really still in heaven instead of on earth (see Isa. 66:1; 2 Chron. 6:18, 21). And even though God revealed Himself on earth ("the earth is my footstool"), no one—not even the priests—had access to that holiest place (Heb. 9:8; see vv. 1–15). However, under the New Covenant in the coming kingdom, God will dwell openly with men (Rev. 21:3).

God's Glorious Precepts. Under the Old Covenant His laws could never be fully carried out. They were written on stones, not on hearts. But under the New Covenant, God's Spirit will make men truly righteous.

God's Glorious Priests. Under the Old Covenant the priests could not bring men to maturity. The priests themselves were weak and died, and their sacrifices never took away sins. But under the New Covenant there is both a perfect and eternal Priest, and a perfect and once-for-all Sacrifice.

Therefore, it is clear that the former dominion, as it was constituted under the Old Covenant, could never bring God's full blessing. That covenant could only portray a righteousness that was unattainable at that time, while preserving God's people from some of the corruption that would have destroyed them. Real and important as the former dominion was, it was only a shadow of what it will be when it is restored. It was a "type" of its own future form.

The story of the first covenant and the earlier kingdom is parallel to that of the Servant of the LORD. That Servant, Isaiah says, was apparently a failure (cf. Isa. 49:4). But He will bring Israel back (v. 5) and also bring the LORD's salvation to the whole earth (v. 6).

More Questions

- 4.√ What three things have we pointed out as part of the glory of the former dominion?
- 5.√ When was the former dominion suspended?
- 6.√ When the former dominion is restored, how will it be improved in relation to the three aspects of question 4?

- 7.√ a. What covenant constituted the former dominion before?
b. What covenant will constitute it when restored?

Prepare for unit 1 examination by learning to correctly answer all questions marked √ in this unit. Practice by answering the following **sample** questions. The first eight are multiple-choice and require that you answer (before the number) with the letter of the best choice.

Sample Exam Questions

- ___ 1. What was God's purpose for creation? a) to have something to rule over b) to give the devil a place to work c) to demonstrate His character d) to show His power in destroying it
- ___ 2. What was God purpose in making man? To make him a) ruler over creation b) the devil's eternal enemy c) nearly as great as angels d) God's slave.
- ___ 3. The key passage for the Abrahamic Covenant is
a) Genesis 1–2 b) Genesis 1–11 c) Genesis 12:1–3 d) Hebrews 6:12–18.
- ___ 4. The consummation of the Abrahamic Covenant is a) the call of Abraham b) the reigns of David and Solomon c) the resurrection of Christ d) the future kingdom of Christ.
- ___ 5. God's throne as Israel's King was a) the altar of burnt offering b) the cover on the ark c) the whole tabernacle d) Mt. Sinai.
- ___ 6. The future kingdom is identified as "the former dominion" in
a) Psalm 114 b) Isaiah 11 c) Isaiah 41 d) Micah 4.
- ___ 7. In order to summarize God's purpose for Israel, Isaiah calls Israel God's
a) servant b) friend c) son d) nation.
- ___ 8. Under the New Covenant, God's laws are written on a) doorposts of houses b) human hearts c) tablets of stone d) tablets of gold.
- 9–11. What three spheres do the blessings of the Abraham Covenant reach into?
9. _____ 10. _____ 11. _____
- 12–13. When Hebrews 6 (KJV) quotes Genesis 22, with what two words does it summarize the Abrahamic Covenant?
12. _____ 13. _____
- 14–16. What three things did God intend for Israel to be (Exod. 19)? (Say each in two to four words.)
14. _____

15.

16.

17–19. What are three things we pointed out as part of the glory of the former dominion?

17.

18.

19.

When you have reviewed well and done well on the sample questions, then take the examination from memory.

Unit Two

Lesson 5

“The Word of the Prophets” (A)

*What is the meaning of Mashiac (Messiah) and Cristos (Christ)?
What office in Israel did the title Anointed One refer to? What Old Testament passage describes the future Ruler as anointed with God’s Spirit?*

The title of this lesson and the next is “The Word of the Prophets.” This expression, referring to Holy Scripture, comes from 2 Peter 1:19 (cf. Heb. 1:1). In this lesson you will consider one of the most important links between the Old Testament and the New Testament—namely, the meaning of the title *Christ*.

Questions to Answer

1. Look up Luke 24:13–27, 44–47. What two subjects in the prophetic word did Jesus point out and explain to His disciples after His resurrection?
2. Jesus’ title *Christ* was a Greek word (*Cristos*) used often in the Greek version of the Old Testament. Below are some sample passages where the Greek Old Testament has this word. Look up these passages and in each case write down (1) how this word is translated in English, (2) who is referred to. Then look in Answers.

Some Passages Where the Greek Old Testament Has <i>Cristos</i>			
	PASSAGE	HOW TRANSLATED	TO WHOM IT REFERS
a.	1 Samuel 12:3, 5		
b.	2 Samuel 19:21 (cf. 1 Sam. 16:13)		
c.	Psalm 89:19–39 (<i>Cristos</i> in v. 38)		
d.	Psalm 2 (<i>Cristos</i> in v. 2)		

The “Word of the Prophets”: Introduction

The word of prophecy in the Bible is like a lamp that can guide us through the dark, if we will pay attention (2 Pet. 1:19). In this lesson and the next, we will take a brief look at a few Old Testament prophecies. It was to the Old Testament prophetic word that Jesus directed His disciples’ attention after His resurrection. In that word (as Luke 24:25–27, 44–47 tell us) He pointed out two main things: (a) the sufferings of the Christ and (b) the glories to follow (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10–12). He chided them for not believing all that the prophets had spoken; then He asked, “Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (Luke 24:26).

The Christ

We will look at some of the passages the Lord probably explained. But first, it is important to understand what He meant, and what they understood, by “the Christ.” The explanation that follows is somewhat technical but very important.

The Meaning of Christ. The LORD designated Saul of Benjamin to be the first human king over the LORD’s dominion, Israel. He directed Samuel to anoint Saul with oil, and He Himself anointed him with the Holy Spirit. From that time forward, Saul was “the LORD’s Anointed (One)” (see 1 Sam. 12:1–5; 24:10; 26:9, 16), divinely endowed to be king. The word “Anointed” in Hebrew is *Mashiac*. The next *Mashiac* after Saul, of course, was David. Like Saul, David was anointed by Samuel and by God to be king over Israel (1 Sam. 16:1, 3, 13; 2 Sam. 19:20–21). Each succeeding king on the throne of David was also the LORD’s Anointed (His *Mashiac*, Psa. 89:20, 38, 31). Other servants of God, such as prophets and priests, were also sometimes anointed. But the expression “the Anointed (One)” (*ha-Mashiac*) came to be reserved for the king alone.

As we have stated, this title *Mashiac* is Hebrew, and means “Anointed (One).” But Jews who spoke Greek had two alternatives in putting *Mashiac* into Greek: (a) they could adapt the pronunciation of the word to Greek and say *Messias* (Messiah), or (b) they could translate it to Greek and say *Cristos* (Crees-TOSS). They nearly always did the latter. When we say “Christ,” we are simply saying in English that Greek word *Cristos*. The Greek word means “Anointed,” as *Mashiac* does in Hebrew.

The Translation of Christ. The use of this title “Anointed (One)” in both Testaments is one of the most important links between them. This link is seen clearly in a Greek version, for there the same word *Cristos* is used in both Testaments. In English, however, two different policies have been used in translating:

- *Mashiac* in the Old Testament has been properly translated as “Anointed (One),” but
- *Cristos* in the New Testament has not been translated (as “Anointed”) but left as “Christ.”

Thus, this sign of continuity between the Testaments has disappeared. Whatever the reasons for this difference in procedure, the Bible student should be aware of it. See the chart that follows.

Since “Christ” in today’s English does not have the royal meaning of *Cristos*, it is good to read “the Messiah” or “the Anointed One” in its place. For example, Matthew 1:1 would begin, “The written account of Jesus the Messiah” or “The written account of Jesus the Anointed One.”

The Words for the Title “Anointed (One)” in Hebrew, Greek, and English Bibles		
Language	Old Testament	New Testament
Hebrew	<i>Mashiac, Messiah</i>	<i>Mashiac, Messiah</i>
Greek	<i>Cristos</i>	<i>Cristos</i>
English	<i>Anointed [One]</i>	<i>Christ</i>

The Anointed One Described. We have seen that the title *Mashiac* (= *Cristos* = Christ) referred to each one who was anointed king over Israel. But no one in the Old Testament fully deserved that title. Only David’s future Descendant would be anointed with the fullness of God’s Spirit:

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
 And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
 And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,
 The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
 The spirit of counsel and strength,
 The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (Isa. 11:1–2, NASB)

These two verses in Isaiah describe the *Mashiac* (that is, the Christ) who was still future. The verses that follow in that chapter describe His future kingdom. Another passage nearby also describes the kingdom of David’s Descendant and shows its identity with the former dominion:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given us;
 And the government will rest on His shoulders...
 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
 On the throne of David and over his kingdom....(Isa. 9:6a, 7a, NASB)

Thus, the Christ Israel was led to expect would be anointed with God’s Spirit in order to rule over His father David’s restored kingdom. This is just the Person the Israelites were looking for in New Testament times. They were looking for the *Mashiac*, the promised Ruler who would restore the throne of David and thus bring God’s “former dominion” back to Israel.

The Anointed One Come to Earth. It is easy to show that in the Gospels the title *Christ* is equivalent to King. For example, the Magi came asking where the recently born “**King**” was. Herod hurried to ask the priests and scribes where the “**Christ**” was to be born. “In Bethlehem,” they answered, “for the prophet said, ‘Out of you shall come forth a **Ruler** who will shepherd my people Israel’” (parts of Matt. 2:1–6, paraphrased). In this passage the words “King,” “Christ,”

and “Ruler” all mean basically the same. (See also Luke 2:26, “the Lord’s Christ”; and Luke 23:2, “Christ, a King.”)

An important question is whether the title “Christ” ever loses this primary meaning of rulership. Does it sometimes mean only “Savior”? No, it does not. Consider, for example, the heavenly announcement in Luke 2:11. The One just born in the city of David was identified as “a Savior, who is Christ [Messiah], the Lord.” The most obvious meaning is that He will save **because He is the expected Ruler**. In what way does He save? His name “Jesus” (the Lord saves) includes the fact that “he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). But as Messiah His salvation includes much more than forgiveness. That is obvious in Isaiah chapters 11 and 12. As you have seen, chapter 11 describes the Anointed One and His kingdom. Then chapter 12 calls it all “salvation.” That chapter records songs of praise to be sung “in that day” (v. 1) just described. Twice it says that God has become **salvation** (v. 2), also that the singer “will draw water from the wells of **salvation**” (v. 3). So the salvation Messiah will bring includes all the blessings of His kingdom.

More Questions

- 3.√ What is the meaning of the Hebrew title *Mashiach* (Messiah) and the Greek title *Cristos* (Christ)?
- 4.√ What office in Israel did the title *Anointed (One)* refer to?
5. This title is a strong link between the Old Testament and the New Testament in the Greek Bible. Why not in English Bibles?
- 6.√ We quoted one Old Testament passage that describes the future Ruler as anointed with the fullness of God’s Spirit. What passage (book and chapter)?
7. According to Isaiah 9, whose throne would the future Anointed One sit on?
8. In what New Testament story did we show that the titles *King*, *Christ*, and *Ruler* are equivalents?

Lesson 6 “The Word of the Prophets” (B)

What two expressions in 1 Peter 1:10–12 sum up prophetic teachings about the Anointed One? Can you summarize nine elements about the predicted kingdom?

In this lesson you will consider more of the Old Testament prophetic messages that described the future kingdom.

Questions to Answer

- 1.√ To review, in the last lesson we saw the Lord’s main concern after His resurrection. He explained what the prophetic word had said about the Anointed One. Read 1 Peter 1:10–12, which sums up these prophetic teachings in two expressions. What two expressions?
2. In Isaiah chapters 41 to 53 there are several pictures of God’s Servant, sometimes called “Israel,” yet sometimes distinguished from the nation. Some of these passages (such as, the beginning of Isa. 42:1–7) make it clear that He is God’s Anointed, who will rule. Look up the last of these pictures, Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12, which shows that He must suffer before He rules. What does 53:10–12 say He will accomplish by His suffering?
3. Read Isaiah 2:1–4, which has the same picture of the future kingdom as Micah 4. This picture combines several of the main elements found in many Old Testament descriptions of the kingdom. List at least four elements you find. (In v. 3 “peoples”—not “people,” as in KJV—is a synonym for nations.)

Isaiah has many more descriptions of the coming kingdom. In the early chapters Isaiah 9:2–7 and 11:1–10 are outstanding. You will look up one more passage in that book—and some samples elsewhere.

4. Isaiah 35:1-10
 - a. What physical change will take place in the desert/wilderness?
 - b. Name some handicapped people who will be healed.
5. Jeremiah 23:5–6
 - a. How is the Ruler’s relationship to David described?
 - b. What is the Ruler’s name?
6. Jeremiah 31:11–12, 27–37
 - a. This passage promises that the LORD will redeem a nation from their enemies and let them rejoice in His bounty. What nation?
 - b. The LORD promises to make a new arrangement with that nation, writing His laws in their minds and hearts. What does He call that arrangement?
 - c. In spite of their rebellions, how long will that nation endure?
7. Zechariah 2:10–12. “The LORD...will again choose Jerusalem” as His capital. But who else besides Israel does He say “will become my people”?
8. Daniel 12:1–3. After the great “time of distress,” Daniel’s “people...will be delivered.” What will happen to the dead (who “sleep in the dust of the earth”)?

In the last lesson we saw what the title *Christ* means. Now we can better appreciate what the Lord Jesus taught His disciples after His resurrection. We will consider what He showed them “in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27) about His sufferings and glory. Also we will summarize the main elements prophesied for His kingdom.

The Sufferings and the Glory

Jesus showed His disciples that it was “necessary for the Christ to suffer” (Luke 24:26, NASB). You should understand by now what this meant. Not that “I, Christ, had to suffer” but that “the Ruler [Christ] you have been expecting must suffer.” He must suffer before He rules—which is the order the true Christ is following. Notice this order in some of the prophecies the Lord explained to them.

Side by Side. In Isaiah the sufferings of the Christ and His glories are often seen side by side. Consider, for example, Isaiah 42:1–7. There we see the Christ (the Anointed One—“I will put my Spirit on him”). He is God’s elect Servant, bringing justice to the world. But in the process He must take care not to cry out nor to become disheartened or crushed. Though God’s anointed Servant, He must face opposition and suffering before His triumph.

Again, in Isaiah 49:1–6 He laments that He has “toiled in vain” (NASB) but still expects His reward from God. God will make Him the light of the nations. And the Servant once abhorred and despised shall be worshiped by kings and princes.

Again, in Isaiah 50:4–7 He daily learns from God and is not disobedient to what He learns. He obeys even though that leads Him to give His back to the smiter and His face to those who pluck out the beard and spit on Him. Despite these sufferings, He knows God is His helper.

His Reward. These prophetic pictures of the anointed Servant who suffers and is glorified, come to a climax in Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12. Because He fully surrenders to be the LORD’s offering for man’s sin (53:6, 10), He will be exalted high above all (52:13, 15; 53:10–12). Because of the anguish of His soul, many others will be justified. In other words, He will not be alone in His kingdom; through His suffering, multiplied “offspring” will share that blessing. The promise to Abraham will be fulfilled.

Main Elements of the Kingdom

We have just glanced at some samples from the rich treasury of prophecy. These are examples of what the Lord pointed out to His disciples after He suffered. We can be sure that just as He literally fulfilled the prophecies of His suffering, He will also literally fulfill the prophecies of His glory. Because He died for our sins in His first coming, we who believe will come from the East and the West—at His Second Coming—to “take [our] places at the feast with Abraham...in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11).

Nine Selected Elements. From the sample passages you have considered, we can now list some of the main elements in the predicted kingdom:

1. The earth will not be discarded but will be the scene of God’s triumph and fulfillment of the promise to Abraham.
2. God will be present, manifesting His righteousness and His glory.
3. The Ruler will be the Anointed One of the house of David.
4. Jerusalem will be the world capital.
5. Israel will be restored.
6. All nations will be subject to God and His Ruler, learning God’s ways.
7. Nature will be freed from the curse.
8. God’s people will be raised to eternal life.
9. Wicked men will be condemned.

Another Question

- 9.√ You have just read nine elements of the coming kingdom. Summarize each of those nine in one or two words each. Then memorize the summaries as found in Answers.

Lesson 7 “The Anointed One, the Ruler”

*What did John the Baptist and Jesus constantly preach?
The coming kingdom on earth: (a) why did Jews call it “the kingdom of heaven”? (b) what else did they call it? (c) how does the Sermon on the Mount show that it had not started?
The Anointed One: (a) when did Jesus become this? (b) as such, what did He promise His followers?*

In this lesson you will consider (a) the meaning of the Messiah’s announcement of the kingdom and (b) the relationship of His preaching to the kingdom. The lesson title comes from Daniel 9:25, part of the amazing prophecy in 9:24–27. That prophecy bridges several centuries to Messiah’s first coming, then jumps to His future kingdom.

Questions to Answer

- 1.√ Both John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2) and Jesus (Matt. 4:17) began with the same constant message. What was it?
2. The Gospel of Matthew often uses a Jewish name for the expected kingdom. To see the origin of this name, read Daniel 2:31–35, 44–45.
 - a. What material in the dream becomes an everlasting kingdom?
 - b. Why would the Jews call this “the kingdom of heaven”?

3. Since the expected kingdom had drawn near, Jesus prepared people for it. In the Sermon on the Mount He told what kind of people it belongs to. What kind, according to Matthew 5:3, 10?

The Old Testament period ended with a remnant of God’s people Israel restored to their land. They were weak and subservient to the Gentiles, but with hope. Their hope was based on two great facts: (a) they were the nation of Abraham, who was promised God’s blessing and multiplication; (b) God had promised through the prophets to restore His “former dominion” among them, the kingdom of David. The Ruler of this restored kingdom would be anointed with the fullness of God’s Spirit and could thus accomplish what no Anointed One under the Old Covenant could do.

The Kingdom Drawn Near

In Daniel 9:25 God had given a timetable for the coming of this “Anointed One, the ruler” (KJV says, “Messiah the Prince”). Then, as God’s clock ticked, Israel waited, and waited, and waited. Suddenly the desert stillness was shattered by a voice: “The kingdom has drawn near” (the literal meaning of Matt. 3:2; 4:17). And close behind the voice of the forerunner came Messiah Himself.

The Greek verb here (*engiken*) is the “perfect tense” of *engidzo* (*draw near*). This verb means “has drawn near” (see Luke 18:40; 19:41), not “has arrived.” Some mistakenly believe that the verb pictures the kingdom *having arrived* and *begun*. But the verb never means “arrive,” which is expressed by other verbs, such as, *heko* (John 4:47; 8:42; Matt. 24:50; Luke 15:27), *enistemi* (2 Thess. 2:2), and *erkomai* (John 4:25, 35). *Engidzo*, like its cognate adverb *engus* (*near*, Matt. 24:32), always refers to **approach**. The approach might be close, but arrival itself must be determined from other factors. Consider two other texts that use the same verb form (*engiken*): James 5:8 and 1 Peter 4:7. James says that “the Lord’s coming **is near**”; Peter says that “the end of all things **is near**.” In neither case have these things arrived yet. (For other examples, see Matt. 21:1; Rom. 13:12.)

What Kingdom Had Drawn Near? Before considering Messiah, let us again emphasize His relation to past history. God had both done and said many things to prepare for Him. His coming was not only a true event in history but also a fulfillment of previous history. This fact is stressed both by Matthew (at the head of the Gospels) and Romans (at the head of the apostolic letters). Each begins by reminding us that Jesus the Anointed One (“Christ”) is the Son of David. This relation of Messiah to David was no mere coincidence; God’s plans were bound to David by an unchangeable covenant. The kingdom God would give Messiah would be the kingdom of David, the former dominion, restored.

Therefore, it is evident that what John the Baptist and Jesus were announcing as near was the kingdom of David (see Luke 1:32–33). The true ruler of David’s kingdom was God; therefore, it

could also be called the “kingdom of God” (as in Mark 1:15). And it could even be called the kingdom of heaven (as in Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7), not because its locale would be in heaven but because it would descend from there. So it had been pictured in Daniel 2, as God’s kingdom on earth that grew from a stone that came down from heaven.

The Jews used these terms interchangeably: *kingdom of heaven* (referring to its origin), *kingdom of God* (referring to its Owner), and simply *kingdom* (since they looked for only one kingdom).⁶

The King Anointed. “The kingdom has drawn near,” John was saying; and the One chosen as King went to John for baptism. There the Father anointed Him, the Spirit visibly descending out of heaven as a dove and remaining on Him. Then came the audible voice, “You are my Son.” The Son was now visibly and audibly constituted as the Anointed One. In Hebrew He was now *Mashiac* (Messiah); in Greek He was now *Cristos* (Christ).

And immediately, in the desert Messiah proved His intrinsic moral worth, His ability to defeat the Tempter and to rule. Like Adam He faced the Serpent—though not in God’s garden but in the desert sin had brought. And He did not fail, but triumphed through faith in God’s Word. Worthy is He to rule!

“The kingdom has drawn near,” Messiah began to say (Matt. 4:17). And those who heard His words and saw His works grew excited. For centuries their people had hoped and waited and worked for the kingdom. The prophets had promised it; this generation would see it! Soon David’s throne would be restored and Israel be exalted, the desert would blossom, the nations live in peace, righteousness fill the earth. So the prophets had said, and so the people expected. And so Jesus led them to believe, for He said the kingdom had drawn near without saying they were mistaken. And as Moses had done centuries before, He led them to a mountain.

The Words of Messiah

A Promise of Blessings. The words of Messiah were summarized in the sermon on that mount. Significantly, His words began with blessings: blessing on the poor in spirit, blessing on those who mourn, blessing on those who suffer because of righteousness. What blessings? Those of the coming kingdom. Twice He said so specifically: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3, 10). How appropriate that His disciples who share Abraham’s faith should here be promised Abraham’s blessings!

The Sermon on the Mount, then, covenants blessing. But not blessing without holiness; it is those who hunger and thirst for righteousness who will be filled. Unlike scribes and Pharisees, they will have an inward righteousness, that without which none shall enter the kingdom nor see the Lord. Such righteousness is guaranteed—and accomplished—by Messiah Himself. Unlike

⁶ See Appendix B on page 66.

the Old Covenant, this New Covenant will have a better Sacrifice, and its laws will be written on hearts.

Entrance Requirements for the Expected Kingdom. At this point we must begin to face the “spiritual kingdom” theory. This theory says that Jesus taught a different kingdom from the one the Jews were expecting. They looked for one that was material, political, and earthly; His was “spiritual.” Normally, this theory teaches that the Beatitudes just referred to were describing a kingdom that had already begun. But definitely the kingdom had not begun. Consider two proofs of that fact.

1. As already pointed out, the Lord had just begun announcing that the kingdom was near. “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matt. 4:17). The verb “began” implies that He continued this message. That fact is confirmed by Matthew 10:7, which repeats the same constant message after the Sermon on the Mount (see also 9:35). The verb “to preach” (also “to say,” as added in Greek) is Greek “present” tense, which here indicates repeated or continued action. “Is near” is the perfect tense of the verb *engidzo* and means “has drawn near” (Luke 18:40; 19:41), not “has arrived” or “has begun.”⁷

In other words, both during and after the Sermon on the Mount, the kingdom was announced as having drawn near. Why, then, should we think that it had begun?

2. Though the disciples were told “yours is the kingdom” (Luke 6:20), yet they were clearly not yet in it: “unless your righteousness surpasses...you will certainly not enter the kingdom...” (Matt. 5:20; see also 6:10; 7:13–14, 21–23).

Instead of announcing that the kingdom was merely spiritual, the Beatitudes told who would inherit it. They did not define the kingdom but gave the entrance requirements. Indeed, the kingdom will be spiritual, in the sense that God and His will are its basis, but this is no reason to deny its material, political, and earthly aspects.

Present Tense for the Future. If the kingdom was still future, however, why did the Lord speak of it in present tense? Why did He say, “theirs is the kingdom” (Matt. 5:3, 10)? Simply because of the kingdom’s nearness and greatness, and its eventual certainty. It was similar to the way Paul spoke later, when he said, “For all things are yours, whether...life or **death** or things present or **things to come**” (1 Cor. 3:21–22, emphasis added). The future already belongs to God’s children.

⁷ See the discussion of the Greek verb earlier in this lesson. Even on Jesus’ final trip to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51)—where He would die and rise again—this message was still valid. He repeatedly told the “seventy-two” messengers to preach it “to every town and place where he was about to go” (Luke 10:1, 9, 11). It was the underlying message of His entire ministry.

More Questions

- 4.√ The Jews looked for God’s kingdom to fill the earth; yet, they called it “the kingdom of heaven.” Why?
- 5.√ What three terms did the Jews use interchangeably for the expected kingdom?
- 6.√ When was Jesus constituted as the Anointed One?
- 7.√ In His words what did the Anointed One promise to His followers?
- 8.√ What two proofs did we give that the kingdom had not begun when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount?
9. The Lord sometimes spoke of the kingdom as present even though it was still future. This was because of its nearness, greatness, and certainty. In a similar way, what belong to Christians according to 1 Corinthians 3?
- 10.√ Review. From Scriptural prophecies godly Jews knew what kind of kingdom to expect. From memory list nine of its elements.

Prepare for unit 2 examination by learning the answers to all questions marked √ in this unit. Then take the examination from memory.

Unit Three

Lesson 8

“The Powers of the Coming Age”

The Lord’s works: (a) what was their main purpose? (b) why did Jesus blame the cities where He had done them? In what sense had the kingdom come upon the Jews? What issue made their leaders decide that He must die? Why did Jesus force that issue?

In this lesson you will consider Messiah’s works and Israel’s tragic response to Messiah. The lesson title is a phrase from Hebrews 6:5 describing those works. The word translated “powers” (*dunamis*) is the normal word for miracles (as, for example, in Matthew 11:20, 21, 23).

Questions to Answer

1. In Matthew 8–9 there are nine scenes of miraculous works in groups of three. Look through those two chapters and list at least three kinds of authority Messiah demonstrated. (Authority over what?)
2. These Messianic works pertain to the kingdom (Heb. 6:5). John the Baptist sent from prison to ask if Jesus were the One they were looking for, that is, the promised King. Read Matthew 11:2–6 and tell what general answer Jesus sent him.

The Works of Messiah

Works of the Kingdom. The works of Messiah are sketched by Matthew (chapters 8–9) after His words. These works prove His power to bring the promised kingdom. What the law, the “first covenant,” had only foreshadowed, He can do. No sickness can overcome His touch; no wind of nature or spirit of evil can disobey His voice. Sin and death, indeed, all their tragic results, bow obediently at His feet. After He has passed by, there remain life and light—and the power of God-like speech.

It is a big mistake to find only “spiritual lessons” in all His miraculous works. Indeed, there are depths of meaning in all He did; and material things often symbolize non-material truths. Yet, the primary character of His works is seen in their character as “powers [miracles] of the age to come” (Heb. 6:5), just as He indicated to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:1–6). This means that He demonstrated by His works, one by one, His ability to restore all things and bring the predicted kingdom. Why is this meaning for His works so overlooked today? Probably because the kingdom itself is misunderstood—or looked at as Israel’s goal and not ours.

Repentance Required. Messiah’s words and works demand repentance and faith from man. He did not change the meaning of the kingdom, but He did show that a new birth is necessary for

entrance.⁸ His works showed that He could bring the very kingdom (with all its elements) that had been prophesied. But His words required that those who heard should humbly admit their need before God, in order to receive His grace. Since they would not repent, neither could they believe.

More Questions

- 3.√ What was the main purpose of the Lord’s works?
4. Both John the Baptist and Jesus had announced that the kingdom had drawn near. But Matthew 11 shows that the common people rejected them both. Read Matthew 11:1–15, then continue.
5. Different versions translate Matthew 11:12 in different ways, depending on how the translators understand the kingdom.⁹ NASB, for example, translates in a legitimate way that harmonizes with our view: “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force [literally, plunder it].” After the kingdom drew near, what kind of reception did it receive?
6. Read Matthew 11:16–19. What other figure of speech did Jesus use here to show what the common people thought of John and Himself?
- 7.√ Read Matthew 11:20–24. Why did Jesus begin denouncing the cities where He had done His Messianic works?
- 8.√ Matthew 12 shows that the leaders of Israel carried this tragic choice toward its climax. Read Matthew 12:1–14, then tell what issue so polarized the leaders against Jesus that they decided He must die.
9. Read Matthew 12:15–45, which shows how wicked that generation was becoming as it rejected the Messiah.
- 10.√ Matthew 12:28 says, “But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Since the kingdom was being proclaimed as near (Matt. 10:7), in what sense had it come “upon them”?
11. What was the horrible picture Jesus gave of that generation of Israel (vv. 43–45)?

⁸ Many assume that John 3 teaches that Nicodemus could have entered the kingdom the night he came to Jesus. That is not correct; Jesus said no such thing. He did say that Jews had to be born from above in order to enter the kingdom. And He clearly implied (in v. 10) that Jewish teachers should have known this (from prophecies such as Ezekiel 36). Since Jesus did not define the kingdom, it must be the one Nicodemus was expecting in accordance with the prophecies—and which is still future.

⁹ See Appendix C, on page 68.

Israel’s Tragic Choice

Israel’s tragic response to her promised Messiah is told in all four Gospels. We will consider it from Matthew 11–12. Messiah’s words had required humble repentance, but Israel would not repent. His works had proved He was the King, but Israel would not believe. Yet, even in her rebellion toward the King (and thus toward the kingdom), Israel was fulfilling God’s plan. By rejecting Messiah and killing Him, she became the instrument to inflict sufferings on Him just as predicted.

The Common People Were Unrepentant. This is seen in their attitude both to John and to the Messiah (Matt. 11). When John sent from prison to ask Jesus if He was truly the Coming One (the Messiah), Jesus said, in effect, “Look at my Messianic works” (Matt. 11:1–6). Then Jesus spoke of John to the multitudes: “Though John was the greatest of God’s servants,¹⁰ he was unacceptable to you. He would not play your game. You played a pipe, but he would not dance. Neither is the Son of Man (that is, Jesus) acceptable. When you lament, He will not mourn” (11:16–19, paraphrased).

Yes, Israel wanted the kingdom, but they wanted it to conform to them. By refusing the kingdom’s representatives, they mistreated the kingdom itself. Instead of humbly submitting to the kingdom, they were **violent** men (11:12, a word always designating evil). They plundered the kingdom for themselves.¹¹ Therefore, their cities, which had seen Jesus’ Messianic works and had not repented, could expect only the severest judgment.

The Leaders Opposed the King. These leaders of Israel reached a new level in opposition (Matt. 12). From the beginning they had resented Jesus for using methods different from theirs, and for preaching that they were not good enough for the kingdom (Matt. 5:20). Soon they had begun explaining His works as those done by the power of “the prince of demons” (Matt. 9:34). Now (Matt. 12) they saw even more reason to oppose Him—because He considered Himself and His work greater than the Sabbath (vv. 8, 12)! The Jewish leaders distorted the meaning and observance of the Sabbath. They considered it only a requirement for man to rest as God had rested after creation. They imagined that by scrupulously—even painfully—obeying, they pleased God. Meanwhile, they missed a more important meaning of the Sabbath: to picture that greater rest when re-creation is complete. That is the kingdom Jesus was working to prepare.¹² He had to force the issue of the Sabbath because it pictured the goal for Him and His Father. Incapable

¹⁰ Note that Matthew 11:11 says that “he that is least in the kingdom” is greater than John, who had previously been greatest. This does not mean that the kingdom began and John missed it. Rather, it means that the kingdom was still future—and more marvelous than anyone can imagine.

¹¹ See Appendix C, page 68.

¹² This explains the unusual expression in Hebrews 4:9: “There remains, then, a **Sabbath-rest** [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God.” The expression summarizes a common and valid concept godly Jews had of the future kingdom. In fact, throughout Hebrews 3:7 to 4:11, to “enter God’s rest” means to enter His coming kingdom. (See my course on Hebrews.) John 5 gives an example of Jesus forcing this issue. Though the man “had been an invalid for thirty-eight years” (v. 5), Jesus chose to heal him on the Sabbath. This was not because the man got faith in Jesus that day—the man did not even know who healed him—but because it was the most appropriate day.

of accepting such majestic claims and powerful proofs by Jesus, the leaders now considered how to destroy Him (Matt. 12:14).

As before, the leaders again accused Jesus of working through Satan’s power. Now He warned them of the sin unpardonable in this age or the age to come (that is, the kingdom age).¹³ His power over Satan, rather than proving alliance with Satan, proved that God’s kingdom “has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28). This statement did not mean that the kingdom, being proclaimed as near, had finally begun. Instead, it meant that in His own Person and works, the Messiah embodies the kingdom. With respect to being established, the kingdom was still only near. But in the Person of the Messiah it had touched earth.¹⁴

That “Wicked and Adulterous Generation.” Faced with these warnings and judgment, some of the leaders asked for a Messianic sign (Matt. 12:38). As though Jesus had not given enough signs already!¹⁵ His answer referred to the sign of Jonah: His own death and burial due to their evil, but resurrection through God’s power.

That generation, as Jesus explained, was like a man cleansed from a demon but empty (Matt. 12:43–45). When the demon returned with other demons, his condition would be worse than before. And so it happened. In fact, some of the very people baptized by John and healed by Jesus took part in delivering Him to be shamed and killed. Yet all of this was by the “predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).

More questions

12. How did Israel’s rebellion against Messiah bring good?
13. ✓
 - a. What day became a huge issue between Jesus and the Jewish leaders?
 - b. Why did Jesus force that issue, often doing miracles on that day?

¹³ This sin would be to reject the Holy Spirit’s testimony, given fully after He came on Pentecost (Acts 5:32, 42). It would be unpardonable because it would reject God’s final testimony about His Son, the only means of pardon.

¹⁴ This is also the meaning of Luke 17:21: “Behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (NASB). It was there as long as the King was there.

¹⁵ Apparently they wanted to see a sign that would force them to believe!

Lesson 9

“Secrets of the Kingdom”

When Jesus began teaching by parables, (a) why did He do so? (b) what was the main secret He revealed? (c) where would the disciples have seen the kingdom in each parable (and specific parables)? (d) what did “the kingdom of heaven is like” mean? (e) what had happened to the kingdom? How does Matthew 25:31–46 show that the kingdom had not changed?

When the rejection of Messiah became evident, He began a decisive turn in His ministry. He revealed new truths about the kingdom, which He called “secrets of the kingdom.”¹⁶ His new way of revealing them was by parables.

Questions to Answer

1. Read Matthew 13:1–52, listing the eight parables Jesus used on that day.
- 2.√ Why did Jesus begin teaching by parables? (vv. 1–3, 10–17)
- 3.√ Considering their previous background, we can assume that the disciples saw the kingdom in the great consummation of each parable. If so, what would they see as the kingdom in The Wheat and the Weeds (vv. 24–30, 36–43)? The Mustard Seed (vv. 31–32)? The Net (vv. 47–50)?

A New Method

On the same day we have been considering (Matt. 13:1), Jesus began to teach by the new method of parables (Matt. 13:3, 10). Although parables can be used as illustrations to make the truth plainer to all, this was not His purpose. Instead, in part His purpose was to hide truth (Matt. 13:9–17). “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” His disciples asked. “He replied, ‘the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them’” (Matt. 13:10–11). This new method of teaching was, therefore, a deliberate judgment, a method that would reveal truth to some but hide it from others. Only those with spiritual ears would really hear (vv. 9, 13, 15, 16); others would go their way uninformed.

“Secrets” were truths not revealed before (Rom. 16:25–26). These new truths had to do with the kingdom. But remember that the Lord had not defined the kingdom; He had announced it as something already known. And what definition had the Jews acquired from the prophecies?

¹⁶ The KJV translates the Greek word *musterion* as “mystery,” a word that came from *musterion*. But that translation is now misleading because “mystery” has now become more limited in meaning. It now “refers to a secret which people have tried to uncover but which they have **failed to understand**.” In contrast, a Greek *musterion* is information “which has not been known before but which **has been revealed** to an in-group or restricted constituency.” (Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, I:345, emphasis added.)

That the kingdom would be the rule of David restored. The “former dominion” would come back to Jerusalem, far more glorious than before. The stone would drop down from heaven and become an earth-filling mountain. This kingdom was being announced as being near; in fact, in the Person and works of Jesus, it had touched upon the earth. And His miracles showed that the kingdom would be all that the prophets had said. Yet the people refused to repent and believe. Therefore Messiah revealed the secrets.

A New Kingdom?

Did the secrets change the meaning of the kingdom or introduce a new form of it? In other words, did Israel’s rejection of the King cause the kingdom itself to be transformed? Our answer to this will affect our interpretation of a great many passages to the end of the New Testament.

The simplest answer—and one that harmonizes with all the facts—is that the kingdom was not changed at all but simply “postponed.”¹⁷ God was revealing for the first time that there would be an interval between Messiah’s sufferings and Messiah’s glory. The unforeseen interval is the age in which we live, in which Messiah has been building the church. Why then, if He was revealing an interim age, did He call such revelations “secrets of the kingdom”? For the simple reason that the new age was part of His kingdom plan. All He would do in the present age would be bound up with the future coming of the kingdom.

This explains why He calls the seed He sows “the message about the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). Was such seed sown only during His earthly life? Did He not preach the same message through His apostles? The second question must be answered yes (Acts 20:25; 28:23, 31; cf. Matt. 24:14). This is why He calls the “wheat” of this age “the sons of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:38). Because even believers today will be heirs of the promised kingdom (James 2:5)—as the Jews thought they were (Matt. 8:12).

Therefore, there is no need to believe that the “secrets of the kingdom” reveal a new form of the kingdom. Instead, they refer to the new age that is intimately bound to the kingdom and leads to it. Can this interpretation be substantiated in the parables? Yes, it can.

The Kingdom Future in the Parables

Sometimes the Lord’s parables leave no doubt that the kingdom is still future. Consider, for example, the parable of The Sheep and the Goats (Matt. 25:31–46). In it the Lord speaks of His future coming “in his glory and all the angels with him [to] sit on his throne in heavenly glory” (v. 31). As King He invites the “sheep” into their “inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you” (v. 34), which is the same as “eternal life” (v. 46). In this parable, then, the kingdom (and eternal life) is clearly future, at the Lord’s Second Coming. Look up Matthew 19:28–29, where you will see the same elements.

¹⁷ It was “postponed” only from man’s perspective. God, of course, knew all along that Messiah would come twice, before and after an interim age.

What about the parable of The Wheat and the Weeds,” which the Lord Himself interprets? In Matthew 13:37–39 He identifies seven items of this parable. For example, the sown field is “the world” (v. 38), and the wheat (“the good seed”) are “the sons of the kingdom” (v. 38). But He identifies none of these seven things as the kingdom itself. He first mentions the kingdom as present in connection with the harvest “at the end of the age”: then the angels “will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling-blocks, and those who commit lawlessness” (v. 41, NASB). When this separation has been made, “then the righteous [earlier called “the sons of the kingdom”] will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (v. 43).

It is true that the words “gather out of His kingdom” might imply that the kingdom had existed previously. But more likely they mean that His first step in inaugurating the kingdom is to purge undesirable elements from it. This would agree with everything else in the parable and the fact that the age to come is the age of the kingdom (cf. Matt. 12:32; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 2:5).

“You are assuming what you are trying to prove,” someone might object. “You assume that the meaning of the kingdom has not changed, then interpret ‘out of His kingdom’ in accordance.” This is partly true. But is it not just what the disciples must have done? The Lord had not told them that the kingdom would assume a new form. Therefore, in this parable they would look for something like the prophesied kingdom—and find it where it was first mentioned as present, at the time of the harvest. Since Jesus said nothing to make them redefine the kingdom, they would understand it as they had before.

The same rule should be followed in all the parables of the kingdom. Look for the kingdom where the disciples would: in the grand climax. Thus, it is not in the net being pulled through the water but after it is drawn to shore (13:47–50). It is not in the mustard seed when sown but after it becomes a tree (13:31–32). Not in the process of inviting to the wedding of the king’s son but in the wedding itself (after the banquet hall is filled with guests, 22:1–14). Not while the virgins wait, but when the groom arrives (25:1–12). Look up each of these examples.

“The Kingdom of Heaven Is Like.” Many of the “secrets” parables are introduced by this expression. Following a common Jewish method of introducing parables, it means, “Here is a parable about the kingdom.” Normally, the first thing mentioned after this introduction cannot be the kingdom—for example, the “man” in 13:24, 45; 18:23; 20:1; 22:2; 25:14; or the “ten virgins” in 25:1. If the kingdom is not usually the first thing mentioned, where then do we find it? Each person will use the same method the disciples used in finding it—namely, where his prior definition leads him. (See Appendix A.)

More Questions

- 4.√ a. What is the main secret revealed in the Lord’s “secrets” parables?
- b. What happened to the kingdom?

- 5.√ a. Today many believe that the secrets describe the kingdom as present, greatly changed from the predicted form. How does Matthew 25:31–46 show that the kingdom was still future and unchanged?
- b. Where would the disciples have seen the kingdom in each parable?
NOTE: On the examination you will be given specific examples, such as, those in question 3. Try that question again, also the four examples given in the paragraph above that begins “The same rule....”
- 6.√ What is the meaning of “the kingdom of heaven is like” introducing these parables?

Lesson 10

“I Will Build My Ekklesia”

Messiah’s ekklesia (assembly): (a) On what occasion did He first mention it by name? (b) How was it foreseen in the Old Testament? (c) How do we know that He began to build it at Pentecost?

In what way did some of Jesus’ disciples see Him “coming in his kingdom”? In Matthew 19:28 what did the Lord call the kingdom and what did He promise the apostles?

In this lesson you will look at more of the Lord’s teachings relating to the kingdom after He began revealing the “secrets.” Among them is His declaration in this lesson title, taken from Matthew 16:18.

Jesus Announces He Will Build the Church.

The Occasion for His Prediction. As soon as Messiah had been rejected, He began revealing secrets about the kingdom to His followers. At the same time He began a series of withdrawals from Galilee (see Matt. 14:13; 15:21; 16:13). On one of these trips He prompted His disciples to make their great confession that He is the Messiah. It was in response to that confession that Jesus first mentioned His church by name, the *ekklesia*, announcing where He would build it (Matt. 16:18). It did not exist yet: “I **will build**” it. It would be mentioned by that name only once more in the Gospels: in Matthew 18:17. Yet, it was constantly in mind; the Lord knew that all four Gospels would be written for and used by the church. The church would become His masterpiece, so that “now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known” (Eph. 3:10).

The Ekklesia Foreseen in the Old Testament. In Matthew the church was still future. Was it also unknown? Jesus predicted it but did not define it. Remember that He had not defined the kingdom either, because they knew what it would be. Did they similarly understand the church? Likely they did. The Greek word He used here—*ekklesia*, meaning “assembly”—was common

in their Greek Bible.¹⁸ There it had both historical and prophetic meanings. (a) Historically, it often referred to Israel as **God’s assembly in the former dominion**.¹⁹ Stephen used it in that sense in Acts 7:38. (b) Prophetically, it occasionally referred to **the assembly of Messiah’s future kingdom**. Hebrews 2:12 quotes Psalm 22:22 in that sense (see also Psalm 35:18). In Matthew 16 Jesus’ disciples would have understood it in the latter meaning. So although the church was still future, it was not unknown.

Some will object that many years later the apostle Paul called the church (*ekklesia*) a newly-revealed secret (mystery/*musterion*). To prove this, they most often cite the following verse in Ephesians. The “body” to which Paul refers is the church.²⁰

This mystery [*musterion*=secret] is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 3:6)

Indeed, Paul refers here to a newly-revealed secret about the *ekklesia* Jesus had predicted. But it is not the *ekklesia*’s **existence** he calls a secret but its **composition**. It is the fact Paul has just addressed in Ephesians, that in this “one body” Gentiles have equal status with Jews. In Ephesians Paul is writing to Gentiles, who previously were all “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (2:12). But now Messiah “has destroyed the barrier...to create in himself one new man out of the two... and...to reconcile both of them to God....Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (2:14–19). That new status and those blessings for Gentiles are what he summarizes in 3:6.

Jesus’ Prediction Fulfilled

When did Messiah begin to build His church? On the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2. On that day—and not before—He began to baptize in/with the Spirit and put people into the church. Consider the evidence (with emphasis added).

- The Bible gives great emphasis to the promise that Messiah would baptize with God’s Spirit. All four Gospels record the following contrast by John the Baptist: “I baptize you with water ...But after me will come one who is more powerful than I...He will baptize you **with the Holy Spirit**” (Matt. 3:11).

¹⁸ We will use the words *ekklesia*, *assembly*, and *church* interchangeably. The popular explanation that it is a relatively small group “called out” from the rest is inaccurate. That explanation is based on the etymology of the word (from *ek* and *kaleo*) but not on usage.

¹⁹ *Ekklesia* was first used to designate Israel as God’s assembly at Mt. Sinai, when they first became God’s kingdom (Deut. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; etc.). It also referred to Israel assembled as God’s kingdom people on other occasions (Deut. 23:1–3; 31:30; 2 Chron. 7:8; 20:5, 14; etc.).

²⁰ Paul uses this figure for the church often, especially in Ephesians (1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16a, 16b; 5:23, 30) and Colossians. For example, “the *ekklesia*, which is his body” (Eph. 1:23; cf. 5:23).

- Just before He ascended, Jesus promised to fulfill this promise soon. He reminded the disciples of this “gift my Father promised.... For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized **with the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 1:4–5).
- This gift (baptism with the Spirit) was given at Pentecost. Peter later recalled that “at the beginning” (Pentecost) they had been “baptized **with the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 11:16).
- The Baptizer is not the Spirit but Jesus the Messiah. He baptizes **with** (or in) **the Spirit**, which, in each passage just quoted, is Greek *en pneumati*.
- Using the very same Greek words, 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 gives a commentary on this baptism. By baptizing us with the Spirit, Messiah places us into His body (the church). Since this is how the church is formed, it began to exist at Pentecost.

Some assume that the church constitutes Jesus’ kingdom. Indeed, it is intimately related to the kingdom, as we will see. But to identify the two produces confusion. This lesson gives you an opportunity to study a number of passages for yourself.

Questions to Answer

1. Jesus’ first mention of the church (*ekklesia*) was when He and His disciples withdrew to the region of Caesarea Philippi. Read Matthew 16:13–21, then answer.
 - a. What was the Great Confession Simon gave on behalf of all the disciples?
 - b. Simon’s confession began, “You are.” This revelation had come from the Father. In response, the Son gave His own two-part revelation, also beginning “you are.” What was His revelation?
 - c. By what expression did the Lord immediately promise authority in the future kingdom of heaven?
 - d. What did He tell the disciples not to do?
 - e. Beginning with Matthew 16:21, there is a new major division of Matthew. It is indicated by a new and continued message that affects the subsequent chapters. What message?
2. Read Matthew 16:27 to 17:8, which tells of a great encouragement for disciples who now had to follow their Messiah to death.
 - a. What promise did He give them all in 16:27?
 - b. What special promise did He give some of them in 16:28?
 - c.√ It seems clear that the Transfiguration (17:1–8) fulfilled this special promise. What did Peter later say in 2 Peter 1:16–18 that they saw on the mountain of Transfiguration?
3. Previously we mentioned Matthew 18:1–4, which shows the need of humility in order to enter the kingdom. There is no need to make this a present kingdom. Read Matthew 19:13–15, which is similar. Who is the kingdom for?

4. Read Matthew 19:16–30, about the rich young ruler and the disciples.
 - a. What did he want (19:16)?
 - b. What other expressions in verses 17, 23, 24, and 29, are equivalents for what he wanted?
 - c.√ In 19:28 Jesus called the future kingdom the *palingenesia*. This word is used once more in the New Testament, in Titus 3:5. There it refers to the new birth of individuals; the NIV translates it literally as “rebirth.”²¹ Here in Matthew it refers to the whole world and reminds us of Old Testament promises of renewal. How does the NIV translate it here?
 - d.√ What honor will the disciples have at that time?
5. Read Matthew 20:1–16. Following the rule we suggested earlier, where would the disciples see the kingdom in this parable?
6. Read Matthew 20:20–23, which reflects the same “Jewish” (but basically correct) view of the kingdom as before.
 - a. What did the mother of Zebedee’s sons want?
 - b. For whom is this honor reserved?
7. We are now looking at incidents during Jesus’ last journey to Jerusalem (Matt. 20:17). We will leave Matthew for a moment and consider an incident in Luke, in which some think Jesus taught a “spiritual” kingdom. Read Luke 10:1, 8–12 and 17:20–25.
 - a. What were Jesus’ heralds telling every town He would visit? (This shows the reason for the question in chapter 17 and proves the kingdom had still not started.)
 - b. What did the Pharisees want to know about the kingdom?
 - c. The Lord’s answer (Luke 17:20–21) must have been puzzling to the Pharisees. To His disciples, however, He immediately explained that they had to await a future “day of the Son of Man” (Luke 17:24, 26, 30). The fact that the kingdom does not come “with your careful observation” means it comes without warning or stages. It is “within you” means “in your midst” (NASB). In what sense was the kingdom in Israel at that time (and yet would await a future day)?
- 8.√ Partly review
 - a. On what occasion did Messiah first mention His *ekklesia* by name?
 - b. How was it foreseen in the Old Testament?
 - c. How do we know that He began to build it at Pentecost?
NOTE: Your answer should include (1) an activity that He began to do at Pentecost and (2) how we know that that activity builds the church (give a reference).
 - d. In what way did some of Jesus’ disciples see Him “coming in his kingdom”?
 - e. What book and chapter support your answer to d?

²¹ In both passages KJV and NASB translate the word “regeneration.”

- f. In Matthew 19:28 (1) what did the Lord call the kingdom, and (2) what did He promise the apostles?

Prepare for unit 3 examination by learning the answers to all questions marked ✓ in this unit. Then take the examination from memory.

Unit Four

Lesson 11

“Heirs of the Kingdom”

Why did Jesus enter Jerusalem seated on a donkey?

How do the following point to the coming kingdom: (a) the Lord’s Supper? (b) the early church in witnessing (two ways)? (c) Paul and Barnabas instructing new churches?

The church’s future and the kingdom: (a) what are two relationships? (b) how is future inheritance determined now (Luke 19)? (c) what will our reward be (Luke 19)?

In this lesson you will first look at more passages in Matthew. Then you will see evidence that the church’s goal and inheritance is the kingdom. The lesson title is from James 2:5 (KJV).

Questions to Answer

- 1.√ Read Matthew 21:1–11. Why did Jesus ride into Jerusalem seated on a donkey?
2. Read Matthew 21:12–16, which records Jesus’ taking charge of the temple and cleansing it. Even the children gave Him due honor. What did they shout?
3. Read Matthew 21:28–32, which shows that the wicked people were better off than the chief priests and elders (v. 23). In verse 31 the translation “are entering ahead of you” (NIV) is misleading. The Greek expression (*proagousin humas eis*) actually says nothing about entering, only about going ahead. Therefore, it does not imply that the kingdom had started. Compare its use in these verses:
 - Matthew 14:22 - Jesus had the disciples get into the boat and “go on ahead of him to” (*proagein auton eis*) the other side. In this case, they did not arrive before He did (v. 34).
 - Matthew 26:32 - Jesus promised His disciples that after the resurrection “I will go ahead of you into” (*proakso humas eis*) Galilee. The emphasis is not on His entering Galilee but on His leading the way (cf. Matt. 28:7).

Back to Matthew 21:31. Which way of ending the statement below would correctly reflect the meaning? Compared to Israel’s leaders, the sinners were a) more interested in the kingdom b) farther down the road to the kingdom c) already in the kingdom d) the only ones that would be in the kingdom.

4. We have already pointed out Jesus’ emphasis on the future glorious kingdom on earth in the parable of Matthew 25:31–46. In the same discourse (which includes Matt. 24–25) there is much emphasis on His glorious Second Coming. What message will be preached in the whole world before the end comes (24:14)?

The Kingdom Is the Church’s Goal

In the Lord’s Teaching. The kingdom is at the end of the road the church travels, as the Bible implies and states clearly. Here are some passages in which the Lord implied that believers in our age are heading for the kingdom.

- In Matthew 8:11 He said that many will come from the East and the West to eat in the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- In Matthew 13:38, 43 He called the wheat of the present age “sons of the kingdom,” who will ultimately “shine like the sun in the kingdom.”
- In Matthew 16 He (a) tied the revelation of the then-future church to the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah (the King), and (b) immediately promised the keys to the kingdom.
- In Luke 22:18–20 He told us to keep the memorial of “the new covenant in my blood.” In this way we celebrate the covenant that will be in force during the kingdom. But He informed us to continue that memorial only “until He comes” to eat and drink with us “in the kingdom” (Luke 22:16, 18; Matt. 26:29).

After His resurrection the Lord’s theme was “the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). This involved time in explaining the Scriptures about the sufferings of Messiah and the glories that will follow (Luke 24:26–27, 44–48). But why this theme of the kingdom, on the eve of starting the church? Not because the church is the kingdom but because the kingdom is its main theme and goal.²²

In the Message of the Early Church. (In this section in quotations we will change *Christ* to *Messiah* and sometimes add emphasis.) Everything the early church said pointed to the kingdom. Consider the apostolic sermons, which launched the church and carried it around the world. Five times their theme is summarized as “the kingdom” or “the kingdom of God” (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23; 28:31). Did the kingdom still mean the same thing as before—namely, the Davidic kingdom to be restored? Yes, as is clear from passages like Acts 1:6; 2:29–36; and 3:17–21.

But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Messiah should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send Jesus, the Messiah appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until **the period of restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets** from ancient time. (Acts 3:17–21, NASB)

²² Of course, some assume that “the kingdom of God” Jesus discoursed about (Acts 1:3) was present—already inaugurated. But if that were true, you would expect to read about that present kingdom at the end of Luke or the beginning of Acts (both by Dr. Luke). You cannot. In every other specific reference to the kingdom in Luke 19 through Acts 1 (Luke 19:12, 15; 21:31; 22:16–18, 29–30; 23:42, 50; and Acts 1:6), it is only—and clearly—**future**. So it is quite unlikely that the kingdom is **present** in Acts 1:3.

The excerpt just quoted is from a message specifically to Israel. It certainly pictures a future kingdom, the one Messiah will rule over, in which He will restore all things as the prophets predicted. (Review what we said in the last lesson about Matthew 19:28.)

The message to Gentiles was not basically different. Consider the summary (in Acts 10:34–43) of the first such sermon, preached at Cornelius’s house. Peter emphasized the same things as the Gospel of Mark: Jesus’ works as God’s Anointed One, His death and resurrection, and His coming rule (“as judge of the living and the dead,” v. 42). Similarly, in Ephesus Paul preached not only “the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24) but “the kingdom” (v. 25). In Rome his message about “God’s salvation” (Acts 28:28) involved “the kingdom of God and...the Lord Jesus Messiah” (v. 31).

The early church was always “teaching and preaching **Jesus as the Messiah** [*Cristos*]” (Acts 5:42, NASB). “Messiah” (The Anointed One), as we have seen, is His title of rulership over the future kingdom (cf. 17:2–3, 7). So how can anyone fully “preach Christ” without telling of His coming eternal triumph? Anything less is not the full gospel. Even in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 the gospel is not just that Someone died and rose, but that Messiah did so. The rest of 1 Corinthians 15 shows that His resurrection guarantees ours, which will take place when He comes back to rule. Thus, preaching the kingdom is the most complete way to preach Christ. (What the sower sows is “the message about the kingdom”—Matt. 13:19.)

To summarize, here are three extracts from the church’s early message (all quoted from NASB). All three state clearly that the church’s goal is the kingdom:

- We must go through many hardships **to enter the kingdom of God**. (Acts 14:22)
- We boast about your perseverance...in all the persecutions...as a result **you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God**, for which you are suffering (2 Thess. 1:4–10)
- You **will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Messiah. (2 Pet. 1:11)

The Kingdom Is the Church’s Inheritance

As Seen In the Epistles. As God’s sons, we will inherit along with Christ. He will rule, and we will rule too. Many of God’s chosen ones are poor now, but “rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him” (James 2:5, NASB).

In 1 Corinthians 4:8 Paul chided certain believers in Corinth for acting in pride as though the kingdom had already started. But since the coming kingdom does not consist in words but in power, Paul would test their power when he arrived (4:18–20). A few verses later, he reminded them that the saints will judge the world (6:2) and even angels (6:3), but that the unrighteous will not inherit that kingdom (6:9–11).

This same thought, that true believers will inherit the kingdom, is found also in Galatians 5:21 (“will...inherit the kingdom”) and Ephesians 5:5–6. God’s sons will inherit with His Son (Gal. 3:26–29; 4:7; Rom. 8:16–17). Man will no longer be slave, but glorious ruler, in that world to come (Hebrews 2:5–10).

Faithfulness to Be Rewarded. The “size” of each believer’s future inheritance is determined by his faithfulness now. One of the passages that teach this is Luke 19:11–27, a parable Jesus told just before His final arrival in Jerusalem. Notice some of the lessons from this parable:

1. He told this parable to correct a false impression that the promised kingdom would immediately appear (v. 11).
2. The promised kingdom would indeed be established, but not until the Lord first went to heaven (v. 12) and then returned (v. 15).
3. The promised kingdom would be established in the same locale (that is, earth), where the servants and the rebellious citizens were left during the Lord’s absence (vv. 12, 15).
4. The Lord’s servants are to deal with His goods in view of His return to rule (vv. 13, 15).
5. His rewards to His servants are positions of rulership in His kingdom (vv. 17, 19).
6. The criterion for reward is faithfulness “in a very little thing” (v. 17).
7. The servant who earns nothing for the Lord will lose everything (vv. 24–26).

More Questions (Partly Review)

5. What great confession was the occasion for Jesus’ revelation of the church?
6. On a particular occasion some of the disciples saw (in a preview) the Lord “coming in His kingdom.”
 - a. What was this occasion?
 - b. What epistle and chapter show that our interpretation of His promise to them is right?
7. In Matthew 19:28 the Lord called the future kingdom by a name that reflected the Old Testament promises.
 - a. What was that name?
 - b. What did He promise the twelve apostles for that future kingdom?
- 8.√ How does the Lord’s Supper constantly point to the kingdom? (two ways)
- 9.√ In its witnessing, what were two ways in which the early church pointed to the kingdom?
- 10.√ Acts 14 tells about the final stages on Paul’s first missionary journey. Read verses 21–22, showing that he and Barnabas returned to the new churches to strengthen them. What did they tell them about the kingdom?

- 11.√ The kingdom is our goal. What other relationship do we have to it?
- 12.√ From the parable in Luke 19:11–27,
- How is our future inheritance determined now?
 - What will our reward be?

Lesson 12 “Your Kingdom Come”

In Revelation 3 on what throne did the Lord say He is now seated? On what throne did He promise the overcomer will sit? In Revelation 5 what did the elders say redeemed men would do? In Revelation 11 after the last trumpet, what announcement did the voices in heaven make? In Revelation what are the three main pictures of Messiah and His main activity under each picture?

The theme of the Book of Revelation is the coming of Messiah’s kingdom. In this lesson you will consider three pictures of Messiah in that book. The lesson title is from the prayer Messiah gave us to pray.

Questions to Answer.

- The book of Revelation has to do with “what must soon take place” (1:1). Everything in the book points to that great consummation about to take place. For example, in 1:5 there are three titles for Jesus Messiah that point to His (a) life and death, (b) resurrection, and (c) coming kingdom. What are those titles?
- In this book John has three principal visions of Messiah. First he sees Him as High Priest presently caring for the seven churches. List at least seven features that John saw or heard, as told in 1:12–16.
- √ To the overcomers in each church the Lord Jesus promises blessings in His coming kingdom. Read what He says to the last of the seven churches: Revelation 3:14–22.
 - On what throne does the Lord say He is now seated?
 - On what throne does He promise the overcomer will sit?
- John next sees Messiah in heaven receiving something from God. Read Revelation 5.
 - What was the mighty angel asking?
 - According to one of the elders, Who had triumphed to open the scroll?
 - √ When the Lamb took the scroll, the elders praised Him for redeeming men from every nation. What did they say redeemed men would do?

5. As the Lamb opens the seven seals on the scroll (Rev. 6–8), judgments take place on earth leading to seven trumpets (Rev. 8–11). Read 11:15–18, which tells what is said right after the last trumpet is blown (and reminds one of Psalm 2).
 - a.√ What announcement do the loud voices in heaven make?
 - b. What are at least four things the elders say God has done or is about to do?

6. The following chapters of Revelation (11–18) deal with various groups and individuals that take part in the last events leading to the kingdom. (If you have time, read them.) Now read 19:11–21, John’s third main picture of Messiah, and list at least seven features of His appearance and names.

At present the Messiah is not occupying His own throne. “I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21). Although He has all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18), He must now wait at God’s right hand until His enemies are made His footstool (Acts 2:34–35; Heb. 1:13; 10:12–13). But “in just a very little while, He who is coming will come” to rule (Heb. 10:37).

While we wait for Him to come, we pray as He has taught us: “Whenever [*hotan*] you pray, say...Your kingdom come...” (Luke 11:2, Greek). Why do we constantly pray “Your kingdom come”? (a) Because He told us to and (b) because the kingdom is both our goal and His. In the kingdom the Father’s will will finally be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But though the Lord waits for His kingdom to come, He is quite active among His kingdom people. This activity is seen in the first of three pictures of Him in the book of the Revelation.

Messiah As High Priest

His Activity As High Priest. John’s first vision of Messiah in Revelation begins in chapter 1. Here he sees Messiah as He is now, High Priest among His lampstands, the seven churches. He knows the churches thoroughly and sends them messages (Rev. 2–3 and all the book; see 22:16). He guides and encourages them, warns and judges. Also He observes the overcomers, those who have faith in Him (1 John 5:4–5; Rev. 12:11). For all overcomers there will be rewards in His coming kingdom (Rev. 1:5–6; 2:7, 26–27; 3:21). For example, they will get to sit beside Him on His throne as He presently sits beside the Father on the Father’s throne.

His Description As High Priest. Messiah’s description in 1:12–19 reveals His capacities as High Priest: His wisdom (v. 14a), His full understanding (v. 14b), His power and authority (vv. 15–16), the effects of truly seeing Him (vv. 17–19). This is the Messiah who is spiritually (and really) with us “all the days until the consummation of the age” (Matt. 28:20, Greek).

Messiah As the Lion Who Is a Lamb

Revelation is the book of the kingdom’s coming. From chapter 4 to the end it deals with “what must take place after this” (4:1), in other words, when the time comes for that kingdom. When

John sees that time arrive, he no longer sees Messiah pictured as High Priest among His lamp-stands on earth. Beginning in Revelation 5, he sees Him as the Lamb among the thrones in heaven.

His Description As Lion/Lamb. Consider three aspects of this description of Messiah.

1. He is worthy to open the scroll because (a) He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the house of David and (b) He “triumphed” with His blood.
2. He is a Lamb, sacrificed yet standing, with full power (seven horns) and full endowment of the Spirit (seven eyes).
3. He receives worship from the four living creatures and twenty-four elders (vv. 7–10), from innumerable angels (vv. 11–12), and from every creature (vv. 13–14).

His Activity As Lion/Lamb. In this aspect His primary activity in Revelation 4–18 is to open the seven-sealed scroll. This scroll is probably the title deed to God’s creation. As the Lamb removes the seven seals, the hindrances to His taking over His inheritance are removed.²³ Each seal brings divinely prepared events and judgments on earth, as related in Revelation 6–18. The last seal includes the seven trumpets (8:1–6); the last trumpet (11:15–19) leads to seven bowls containing the climax of God’s wrath (15:1).

Therefore, the Lamb’s opening the seals prepares the earth for Him to take over. Meanwhile, He protects those of His people who must pass through tribulation. He cares for them even when they must die; for they are destined to reign.

You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.(5:9–10; cf. 20:4; 22:5)

“The Wedding Supper of the Lamb.” Although Messiah will be seen in a third picture, He continues to be “the Lamb” forever (cf. 22:3). As such, when “the wrath of God’s is finished” (15:1; 16:17), He will get “married.” “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb” (19:9). In contrast to the filthy and condemned “great prostitute” Babylon (17:4; 19:2), “His bride has made herself ready” (19:7). Who is this bride? There can be no doubt. An angel

²³ This stage in Revelation corresponds to Psalm 2:8–9. The Lord has said to Messiah, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them....” By taking the scroll, He asks for His inheritance. It is the same scene as in Daniel 7:13–14: The “son of man...approached the Ancient of Days and...was given authority, glory and sovereign power [over] all peoples, nations and men....His dominion is an everlasting dominion...and his kingdom...will never be destroyed.”

later offers to John, “Come, I **will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb**” (21:9, emphasis added). Then John reports that “he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and **showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God” (21:10, emphasis added). So the bride is the capital city—including its inhabitants (19:8; 22:19). This is a figure of speech common in the Orient and in the Bible, that a King marries His capital city (e.g., Isa. 54:5; 62:5).²⁴ The inhabitants of this glorious city will include both “the twelve apostles” (21:14) and “the twelve tribes” (21:12). As you saw before, the nation of Israel will be part of the *ekklesia*.

Messiah As King of Kings

The third picture of Messiah is in Revelation 19, when He comes to reign. Heaven is ringing with hallelujahs for God’s triumphs and the Lamb’s imminent wedding. Then Jesus appears as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, riding at the head of the heavenly army. Heaven opens for His descent to earth, and He comes as Conqueror on a white horse.

This description of Messiah in Revelation 19 turns on His ability to wage war and His ability to rule. Varied are His names, indicating His many qualities both visible and hidden. On His head are the royal crowns of many nations. The waiting period is ended; the kingdom has begun.

More Questions

- 7.√ To summarize, tell what are the three main pictures of Messiah in the book of Revelation, and His main activity under each picture.
8. What does Revelation identify as “the bride, the wife of the Lamb”?

²⁴ This figure permeates entire sections, such as, Isaiah 54–55, 60, 62; Hosea 1–3. Variations of it are found in many passages, such as, John 3:29, 2 Cor. 11:2 (the church in Corinth to be His bride); Eph. 5:22–32 (the church already married to Christ, which is already His body).

Lesson 13 “The Everlasting Kingdom”

How long will Messiah’s kingdom last?

The Millennium: (a) what is it? (b) what throne will the Son sit on during it? after it? (c) what two important events will take place at its end? (d) when will the earth be renewed? (e) why is bodily resurrection necessary?

What does Revelation 21–22 describe? Where will the capital city of the future kingdom go? What will be the two main functions of God’s servants? What is the Bible’s last prayer?

In this lesson you will consider the initial stage and the perfected stage of Messiah’s coming kingdom. That kingdom will never end, as indicated in the lesson title, which is from the King James Version of 2 Peter 1:11.

Questions to Answer

1. a. Read the following verses and from each verse copy any words that show how long the kingdom will last:

Luke 1:33	Daniel 2:44	Isaiah 9:7
Revelation 11:15	Daniel 7:14, 18	2 Peter 1:11
		Revelation 22:5
- b.√ To summarize, how long will Messiah’s kingdom last?
2. In spite of what we just learned, a special period is marked off. Read the following verses, and answer.
 - a. Revelation 20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6 all mention this special period. How long does it last?
 - b. Revelation 20:4–6 shows that this period begins with the fulfillment of an important promise that began in the Old Testament. What promise?
 - c. 1 Corinthians 15:24–26 gives a major purpose for this period. What?
 - d.√ Revelation 20:7–15. What two important events will take place when this special period has ended?
3. Revelation 21–22 describes the eternal state. Much of this passage tells about the majestic capital city. Earlier you saw that it is called “the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”
 - a. What is the name of the capital city?
 - b.√ Where does John see this city going? (21:2–3, 10, 24, 26)
 - c. What is accomplished by its going there? (21:3)
 - d. List any five features of the capital city that especially impress you.
 - e. What throne does John see in this city?
 - f.√ According to 22:3, 5, what will be the two principal functions of God’s servants?

g.√ The prayer in 22:20 is the last direct prayer of the Bible. What is it?

“HE WILL REIGN...*FOREVER*; HIS KINGDOM WILL *HAVE NO END*” (Luke 1:33, NASB, with emphasis added, as in all the verses quoted below). The kingdom Messiah brings to earth will never end. Listen to the great voices in heaven shortly before He comes:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ;
and He will reign *forever and ever*. (Rev. 11:15b)

“Forever and ever” can hardly be finished in a thousand years. Yet some mistakenly believe that His kingdom is just the Millennium. Consider some other prophetic references to the unending duration of His kingdom.

The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will *never be destroyed*, and that kingdom will *not be left for another people*; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself *endure forever*. (Dan. 2:44)

His dominion is an *everlasting* dominion
Which *will not pass away*;
And His kingdom is one
Which *will not be destroyed*. (Dan. 7:14b)

But the saints...will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom *forever, for all ages to come*. (Dan 7:18)

There *will be no end* to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom...
From then on and *forevermore*. (Isa. 9:7)

The *eternal* kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11)
And they shall reign *forever and ever*. (Rev. 22:5)

The Millennium

A Part of the Kingdom. Since Christ’s coming kingdom will never end, how do we explain the Millennium? For in Revelation 20:4, 6 it says that those who take part in the first resurrection will reign with Christ one thousand years. Also, 1 Corinthians 15:25 marks off the same period: “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” Thus, in seeming contradiction of many texts that stress the unending duration of His rule, others seem to limit it.

How do we solve this problem? Not by denying that the Millennium is part of God’s kingdom. Passages such as Matthew 25:31, 34; Luke 21:25–31; 22:18; and Revelation 11:15 show that it is. The eternal kingdom begins at Messiah’s return.

A Period of Transition. Not only is the Millennium part of the eternal kingdom; it also brings transitory things to a close. It finalizes the ages of testings and allows Messiah, who is “the last

Adam” and “the second man” (1 Cor. 15:45–47) to bring all things under man’s dominion. At that time He will reverse the history ruined by the first Adam, just as God promised long ago (Gen. 3:15).

Thus, the Millennium is transitional. It is like a vast entrance hall into God’s even vaster kingdom. Within the Millennium there are both eternal and transitory aspects. In its eternal aspect only those who are glorified will inherit (1 Cor. 15:45–50). But also present at the beginning of the Millennium will be non-glorified people. These will eventually inherit but meanwhile produce unregenerated offspring.²⁵

Revelation 20 teaches us that the devil will be released at the end of the Millennium. Then many of those born during the Millennium will rebel against Messiah’s righteous rule. When that happens, the Son will put down the final rebellion and judge the unsaved. Then He will turn the kingdom over perfect to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24–26), so “that God may be all in all” (15:28). But the Son will not then cease to reign; rather, His throne will merge with the Father’s throne. And the greatest glory of the capital city, heavenly Jerusalem, will forever be “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:3).

A Time of Regeneration. Let us state this transitional character of the Millennium in another way, as in Matthew 19:28 (cf. Acts 3:20–21). It is the age during which the earth (and everything else) is made new, the *palingenesia* (see lesson 10). The new earth begins when the Millennium begins, as we can see by comparing Isaiah 65:17–20 with 2 Peter 3:13.²⁶ But it will be completely new only when the Millennium is finished (Rev. 21:1).

Not that the present earth will be completely abolished. Rather, it will “pass away” and “be changed” from its present condition. In a similar way, both earth and heaven were changed by the flood (2 Pet. 3:5–7). “The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (v. 6, KJV). It “perished” from what it was but survived in a new form.

Just as the earth will be changed, so our bodies, which “perish” in death, will be raised new (1 Cor. 15:42–44). Jesus’ resurrection inaugurated the “first resurrection,” which will climax with that of the tribulation martyrs who belong to Him (Rev. 20:4–6).

The bodily resurrection is one of the foundations of our faith (Heb. 6:1–2; 1 Cor. 15:4, 12–20). Biblical Christianity does not emphasize survival of the spirit but raising of the body (Acts 4:2; 23:6; 24:15). Why is resurrection necessary? Because, as 1 Corinthians 15:50 makes clear, only that vastly superior body (described in vv. 42–44) can inherit the kingdom. Our bodies will be like Christ’s risen body. Resurrection is essential to His kingdom.

²⁵ If they were all glorified, no additional children would be born. “In the resurrection from the dead [they] will neither marry nor be given in marriage” (Luke 20:35).

²⁶ 2 Peter 3:13 states that “**in keeping with his promise** we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth.” The promise Peter refers to is the one in Isaiah 65:17–20, which describes the Millennium.

The Eternal State

The Goal of History. The final two chapters of the Bible (Rev. 21–22) describe the eternal state, which is the perfected form of Christ’s eternal kingdom. It will be the same kingdom that begins at the return of the glorious Conqueror seated on the white horse (Rev. 19). It will be Abraham’s goal, long awaited as the fulfillment of God’s promises to him. It will be the restoration and perfection of “the former dominion” as covenanted to David. It will be the kingdom of God, in which He rules first through His Son for a thousand years—and finally with His Son, forever. It will be the stone descended from heaven, the kingdom of heaven upon earth. It will be real triumph and glory for man.

Remember that Revelation 21–22 do not describe a scene in heaven but the coming of God’s city to the renewed earth.

Joyful Victory. For individuals the kingdom will mean eternal life. In our glorified bodies we will retain our distinct personalities and functions, and will joyfully rule for ever.

For the nation of Israel the kingdom will mean restoration. Long out of God’s favor, Israel will again become His people (Jer. 31:33), “the head, not the tail” (Deut. 28:13).

For the nations the kingdom will mean peace and righteousness. They too, will retain their varied attributes and will bring their glory and honor to the capital. (Rev. 21:24–26)

For nature the kingdom will mean liberation (Rom. 8:18–22). There will be no more curse—rather, rejoicing with the sons of God.

For Messiah the kingdom will mean vindication and glory in the world that once rejected Him. He will finally inherit as God’s Firstborn Son and Abraham’s Heir. But He will not inherit alone; with Him shall be His many redeemed.

For the Father the kingdom will mean the accomplishment of His purpose in creation and His promises to Adam, to Abraham, and to David. The material world will be forever and perfectly united to the spiritual world in a pleasing and powerful demonstration to the angels and all the universe of God’s righteousness, goodness, and love. The devil and his works will be forever banished. God will forever dwell with man, and man will forever rule with God.

This is Messiah’s coming kingdom, for which we work and pray.

More questions

- 4.√ What is the Millennium?
- 5.√ What throne will the Son sit on (a) during the Millennium? (b) after the Millennium?

- 6.√ When will the earth’s renewal take place?
- 7.√ Why is bodily resurrection necessary?
- 8.√ What do the last two chapters of the Bible describe?
9. Choose what the kingdom will mean for each of the following.
- | | FOR | | IT WILL MEAN |
|----|-------------|----|---|
| a. | Individuals | 1) | No more curse |
| b. | Nations | 2) | Accomplishment of His purpose in creation |
| c. | Nature | 3) | Peace and righteousness |
| d. | Messiah | 4) | Eternal life |
| e. | The Father | 5) | Vindication, glory, inheritance |
| f. | Israel | 6) | Restoration to God’s favor |
10. What will the kingdom mean for you?

Prepare for unit 4 examination by learning the answers to all questions marked √ in this unit. Then take the examination from memory.

- b. on the cover (KJV, mercy seat) on top of the ark (and thus between the two cherubim) (25:22)
- 4. A cloud covered it and God's glory filled it.
- 5. You probably said that God's earthly kingdom began then.
- 6. a. Micah 4
b. God's Old Testament kingdom over Israel
c. at the Exodus (when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai) (Psa. 114:1-2)
- 7. in heaven and on earth
- 8. a. (1) God's own possession, (2) kingdom of priests, (3) holy nation
b. the Servant of the LORD

Lesson 4

- 1. a. God's presence (that is, His glory that filled the tabernacle)
b. God's laws
c. the priesthood
- 2. "many days," that is, the time that Israel would continue without a king (v. 4)
- 3. the glory of God
- 4. God's presence, precepts, and priests
- 5. when Jerusalem fell (in 586 B.C.)
- 6. Presence - God will truly dwell on earth, and men will have access to Him.
Precepts - These will be written on men's hearts.
Priests - His Priest will forever be Christ, who offered the eternal sacrifice.
- 7. a. Old Covenant b. New Covenant

Sample Exam Questions

- | | | | | |
|------|------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. c | 5. b | 9. personal | 13. multiply | 17. God's presence |
| 2. a | 6. d | 10. national | 14. God's own possession | 18. God's precepts |
| 3. c | 7. a | 11. international | 15. kingdom of priests | 19. God's priests |
| 4. d | 8. b | 12. bless | 16. holy nation | |

UNIT 2

Lesson 5

- 1. the Christ's sufferings and glory (especially v. 26)
- 2. a. translated "anointed," of King Saul
b. translated "anointed," of King David
c. translated "anointed one," of David and his successors on the throne
d. translated "Anointed One," of God's future King who will rule over the nations
- 3. Anointed (One)
- 4. the king
- 5. because the Hebrew word is translated but the Greek word is not translated
- 6. Isaiah 11
- 7. David's

8. the story of the Magi looking for the recently born King (Luke 2)

Lesson 6

1. (a) the sufferings of Christ (b) the glories that would follow
2. Perhaps the best answer is that He will justify many (v. 11).
3. Among the elements you probably noticed: It will be on earth, with Jerusalem the capital, with God ruling, with all nations subject and living in peace and righteousness.
4. a. It will blossom and become glorious (vv. 1–2), abound with water and plants (v. 7).
b. blind, deaf, lame, mute (vv. 5–6)
5. a. “a righteous Branch” (v. 5)
b. The LORD Our Righteousness
6. a. Jacob (v. 11 = Israel, v. 10)
b. the New Covenant (v. 31)
c. for ever (vv. 35–37)
7. many nations (v. 11)
8. They will awake (rise from the dead), some to life and some to shame (v. 2).
9. Learn this list:

1. On earth	4. Jerusalem	7. No curse
2. God present	5. Israel	8. Resurrection
3. God’s Anointed	6. Nations	9. Judgment

Lesson 7

1. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”
2. a. the stone that becomes a mountain filling the earth
b. because it comes from heaven (from the God of heaven)
3. the poor in spirit, those who are persecuted because of righteousness
4. because Daniel 2 showed that it would descend from heaven
5. kingdom, kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven
6. when He was baptized
7. the blessings of the kingdom
8. (a) He continued preaching that it had “drawn near.”
(b) His disciples had not entered it.
9. all things, including death and things to come
10. Your answer should be the same as that for the last question in lesson 6.

UNIT 3

Lesson 8

1. Some of the possible answers are: authority over sickness, over demons, over death, over nature.
2. He told John’s disciples to go tell John the things they heard and saw, specifically, His miraculous works.
3. to prove He could bring the promised kingdom

5. a violent reception, with violent men trying to plunder it
6. children angry with other children for not playing their games
7. because they did not repent
8. the Sabbath
10. The kingdom's power, which could destroy Satan's kingdom, was the power of the Holy Spirit employed by Jesus.
11. He compared them to a man purged of an evil spirit but who is later indwelt by that spirit plus seven worse spirits.
12. By rejecting Messiah and killing Him, Israel became the instrument to inflict sufferings on Him just as predicted. In other words, Israel fulfilled God's plan for the Messiah to suffer.
13.
 - a. the Sabbath
 - b. because the Sabbath pictured the goal for Him and His Father, the kingdom Jesus was working to prepare (the great future rest when re-creation is complete)

Lesson 9

1. Here is one set of titles for them: The Sower, The Wheat and the Weeds, The Mustard Seed, The Yeast, The Treasure, The Pearl, The Net, The House Owner.
2. to reveal the secrets (mysteries) of the kingdom to His disciples while hiding them from others
3. The Wheat and the Weeds - the conditions after the harvest
The Mustard Seed - the fullgrown tree
The Net - the conditions after the judgment
4.
 - a. the present age, separating the two comings of Messiah
 - b. It was "postponed."
5.
 - a. In it Jesus says He will come (again) in glory to sit on His throne of glory and permit others to inherit the kingdom.
 - b. in the grand conclusion
6. "Here is a parable about the kingdom."

Lesson 10

1.
 - a. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16)
NOTE: The key expression is "Christ." The parallel passages in Mark 8:29 and Luke 9:20 do not even report that Simon said "the Son of the living God." It is evident that Simon meant "Son" as an equivalent to "Christ," just as Solomon was God's Son (2 Sam. 7:14).
 - b. "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (16:18)
 - c. promising the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter (16:19)
 - d. not to tell anybody that He was the Christ (16:20)
 - e. the message that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer, be killed, and be raised
2.
 - a. that He would come in His Father's glory with His angels, and reward each person
 - b. that they would not taste death before they saw Him coming in His kingdom

- c. His majesty (that is, of His Second Coming, v. 16)
- 3. little children and those like them
- 4. a. eternal life
- b. 17 - enter life 23 - enter the kingdom of heaven 24 - enter the kingdom of God
29 - inherit eternal life
- c. “the renewal of all things”
- d. They will sit on twelve thrones judging (ruling over) the twelve tribes of Israel.
- 5. at the time of settling accounts (vv. 8–16)
- 6. a. for her sons to sit at His right hand and His left hand in His kingdom (v. 21)
- b. for those the Father has prepared it for (v. 23)
- 7. a. that the kingdom had come near them (10:9, 11)
- b. when it would come (17:20)
- c. It was present in the Person of the King.
- 8. a. when He and His disciples withdrew to the region of Caesarea Philippi
- b. Psalm 22:22 referred to the future assembly of Messiah’s kingdom by that name.
- c. (1) because at Pentecost He began to baptize believers with the Spirit, (2) which activity 1 Corinthians 12 says builds the church
- d. Some (three) of them saw His majesty on the mount of Transfiguration.
- e. 2 Peter 1
- f. the renewal of all things (or, regeneration, or *palingenesia*, or rebirth)
to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel

UNIT 4

Lesson 11

- 1. to fulfill the prophecy (Zech. 9:9) about the King coming in that manner (v. 4)
- 2. Hosanna to the Son of David (21:15)
- 3. Ending b is correct.
- 4. this gospel (good news) of the kingdom
- 5. You are the Christ (Messiah).
- 6. a. The Transfiguration
- b. 2 Peter 1
- 7. a. the renewal of all things (or, regeneration, or *palingenesia*, or rebirth)
- b. to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel
- 8. (a) It celebrates the New Covenant, which will be the covenant of the kingdom.
- (b) We keep it until He comes in His kingdom.
- 9. (a) The apostolic sermons were summarized as “the kingdom of God.”
- (b) They preached Jesus as the Christ (Messiah).
- 10. that they must enter it (after passing) through many hardships
- 11. It is also our inheritance.
- 12. a. by our faithfulness
- b. positions of rulership in His kingdom

Lesson 12

1. (a) the faithful witness (b) the firstborn from the dead (c) the ruler of the kings of the earth
2. You should have listed some of these: He was among seven lampstands; was like a son of man; was dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet; had a golden sash around His chest; had head and hair white like wool; had eyes like blazing fire; had feet like bronze glowing in a furnace; had a voice sounding like rushing waters; had seven stars in His right hand; had a sharp double-edged sword coming out of His mouth; had a face shining like the sun.
3.
 - a. His Father's throne
 - b. Messiah's throne
4.
 - a. Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? (5:2)
 - b. the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David (5:5)
 - c. reign on the earth (5:10)
5.
 - a. The kingdom of the world now belongs to our Lord and His Christ.
 - b. taken His great power and begun to reign, judge the dead, reward His servants, destroy those who destroy the earth
6. Some features you may have listed: He is seated on a white horse; His names are Faithful and True; with justice He judges and makes war; His eyes are like blazing fire; He has many crowns on His head; He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood; His name is the Word of God; a sharp sword comes out of His mouth; He will rule the nations with an iron scepter; He has the name King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
7.
 - (a) As High Priest He takes care of the churches.
 - (b) As the Lion Who is a Lamb, He opens the seals in preparation to take over the earth.
 - (c) As King of Kings He comes to earth and rules.
8. New Jerusalem

Lesson 13

1.
 - a. (For the answers, see the italicized words in the Bible quotations right after the questions.)
 - b. forever
2.
 - a. a thousand years
 - b. the resurrection
 - c. for Messiah to put all enemies under His feet, including death
 - d. (a) the devil's release and deception of the nations (b) the final judgment
3.
 - a. new Jerusalem (v. 2)
 - b. to the new earth (The city is "coming down out of heaven.")
 - c. God's dwelling is with men.
 - d. (Memorize the five that impress you most.)
 - e. the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:3)
 - f. to serve Him and to reign
 - g. Come, Lord Jesus.

4. the first phase of Messiah's kingdom, in which He perfects the kingdom to present it to the Father
5. (a) His own throne (b) the throne of God and of the Lamb
6. beginning with the Millennium and perfected at the end of the Millennium
7. because only the resurrection body can inherit the kingdom
8. the eternal state, the perfected form of Messiah's kingdom (Remember that this is not a description of heaven but a description of heaven on earth—that is, the capital city descended to the new earth.)
9. a. 4 b. 3 c. 1 d. 5 e. 2 f. 6

APPENDIX A

Do the Gospels Teach a Present Kingdom?

If we take the Old Testament predictions about the kingdom at face value, they teach a future golden age upon earth, a political and material kingdom. God will rule through or with His Anointed One, from Jerusalem as capital, with Israel redeemed and the nations living in righteousness and peace. Nature will be freed from its curse; wickedness will be judged; the righteous will be raised. “The earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9).

Many teach that this future golden age on earth will last a thousand years (Rev. 20) and call it the “Millennium.” Others, like this course, teach that the Millennium is just the beginning of an eternal kingdom. All who believe in the Millennium are millennialists. Most of them are **premillennialists**, believing that the Lord Jesus will come back **before** the golden age, to inaugurate it. Premillennialists believe that the Old Testament and New Testament prophecies mean what they say.

Others, however, are amillennialists. They believe in no such political and material kingdom on earth. They believe that most of the Old Testament prophecies—and many New Testament prophecies—should not be understood in the usual way but in a “spiritual” way. Consequently, they believe that the Lord established a “spiritual” (that is, non-political and non-material) kingdom when He came.

In this study course we follow the premillennial interpretation of prophecies. But many premillennialists, though they believe in a future “political” kingdom on earth, believe in a present “spiritual” kingdom as well. They believe that since the kingdom came near, Jesus must have established it in some form. These people usually teach that the “secrets” (“mysteries”) describe such a “mystery form” of the kingdom.

In discussing the secrets we have shown that they do not describe a present form of the kingdom; the kingdom is still the great future goal. But there are a few New Testament verses in which the kingdom is indeed spoken of as present. For example, Matthew 21:43 shows that it would be “given” to a different “nation.” How can the kingdom be given if it has not yet begun? The answer is that the still-future kingdom did have a past history (when it was the “former dominion”) in Israel. And Israel had previously been charged with preparing for the restoration of the kingdom. That responsibility has now been entrusted to others.

Only because of such authority could Israel’s leaders “shut up the kingdom” from men who wanted to enter it (Matt. 23:13). They could not have shut up a purely spiritual kingdom. No one can keep God from ruling in men’s hearts; He has so ruled in every age. But this heart-rule is never called His “kingdom.” What the leaders of Israel accomplished by their rebellion was to force the postponement of the kingdom (speaking from a human perspective) so that no one could enter.

A few other verses, such as Romans 14:17 and Colossians 1:13, could be interpreted to say that the kingdom has begun. But not necessarily so. For they can also be explained—as we show in the lessons—from speaking of the future as though it were present. Our life is hidden with Christ and will appear when He does (Col. 3:3–4).

In conclusion, there is insufficient evidence to say that the kingdom came in a spiritual form. If we are believers, we belong to the future kingdom, but we must wait for it.

APPENDIX B

Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God

The terms used most often in the New Testament for God's kingdom are *kingdom of heaven* (over thirty times, all in Matthew) and *kingdom of God*. These terms—and other New Testament terms for the kingdom—are equivalents. The only difference is that of emphasis. Even an interpreter who tries to show greater differences, like Scofield, must admit that *kingdom of God* is “used in many cases as synonymous with the kingdom of heaven...” (*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1002).

Scofield goes on to draw this distinction: “The kingdom of God is also used to designate the sphere of salvation...in contrast with the kingdom of heaven as the sphere of profession which may be real or false.” For him, then, the kingdom of heaven is sometimes “the sphere of profession,” which requires no genuine conversion to enter, whereas the kingdom of God does. In Scofield's thinking the terms overlap but each represents a separate entity. Here are three reasons why neither Scofield's method for distinguishing the two terms, nor any other, is valid.

1. The Jews of New Testament times used these terms interchangeably. “According to rabbinic views of the time, the terms ‘Kingdom,’ ‘Kingdom of heaven,’ and ‘Kingdom of God’ ...were equivalent” (A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, I:266). Jesus freely used these same terms. Therefore, He would feel obligated to clearly present the difference in their meaning—at least for His disciples—if there were a difference. Yet, no one can show where He did so. All supposed distinctions are based on questionable inferences.
2. Sometimes the Lord spoke of the kingdom with no qualifying phrase, such as “of heaven” or “of God.” For example: “sons of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19) or “gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 24:14). This lack of qualification implies that there is only one kingdom. If there were others, there would be confusion as to which is meant.
3. If the kingdom of heaven really were different from the kingdom of God, then the former expression would appear in other New Testament books besides Matthew. It is obvious that the kingdom is constantly referred to, especially in the Gospels. Why, then, should Matthew alone be interested in what he calls the “kingdom of heaven”? If it meant “the sphere of profession,” for example, even believers would be in it. Why, then, would no other New Testament writer be led to talk about it? But if it is a favorite Jewish designation for the kingdom, yet one that Gentiles can (and do) misunderstand, we can see why other writers avoid it.

Plans to distinguish the terms for the kingdom are too complicated; they fall from their own weight. Consider, for example, how you would use Scofield's plan in a given passage, such as Matthew 18:1 (“Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” NASB). First, you must determine if “kingdom of heaven” here means the same as “kingdom of God,” or does it mean “the sphere of profession”? If the latter, it can still mean any of three aspects: (a) as “at hand,” (b) “as fulfilled in the present age,” or (c) “as fulfilled after the second coming of Christ” (Scofield,

p. 994). Since the Lord says conversion is necessary in order to enter this kingdom (Matt. 18:3), it would seem to be no “sphere of profession.” Yet, sticking by Scofield’s definition, some of his disciples teach that this conversion need not be genuine!

The matter is not so complicated: the New Testament kingdom is always the same thing. Theologians who try to explain it on the basis of their pet theories or their inductive New Testament studies fall into the error of the blind men describing the elephant. Rarely can they imagine how great the kingdom is.

APPENDIX C

The Meaning of Matthew 11:12

Theology affects translation. Notice how their theology affected NIV (New International Version) translators in Matthew 11:12. Convinced that the kingdom began and could be entered in Jesus' day, they took unusual or mistaken meanings for certain words in Matthew 11:12.

Matthew 11:12 in Two Translations			
Greek for Bolded Words	NIV (has unusual meanings)	NASB (has normal meanings)	Comments
<i>biadzetai</i>	From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing,	And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence,	This verb means rape in Deut. 22:25, 28. In Matt. 11:12, Louw & Nida translate, "suffers violent attacks"; NET, "has suffered violence."
<i>biastai</i>	and forceful men	and violent men	Never used elsewhere of good men.
<i>harpadzousin</i>	lay hold of it.	take it by force	Elsewhere NIV always translates this verb as take quickly or forcibly: see Matt. 12:29; 13:19; etc.

We can conclude that Matthew 11:12 does not speak of men entering the kingdom but plundering it.* The same argument applies to the parallel passage in Luke 16:16. There both NIV and NASB say that "everyone is forcing his way into" the kingdom. But the nearly identical form of *biadzetai* should be translated "uses violence." That raises the question of how "everyone" (people in general) or "violent men" could use violence against the kingdom or plunder it? By their selfish treatment of its representatives: John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus' own representatives. Instead of submitting to it humbly, they tried to use it for their own purposes.

What is your own attitude toward the kingdom?

* For the same theological reason, the NIV misinterprets Matthew 21:31. The NIV states that to chief priests and elders Jesus says that wicked people "**are entering** the kingdom of God **ahead of you.**" However, the Greek expression represented by bold letters (*proagousin eis*) says nothing about arriving or entering, as seen in NIV's translation of the same expression in 14:22 and 26:32. Matthew 21:31 means that wicked people were ahead of the leaders on the way to the kingdom.