

## Kingdom Studies Digest

John Hepp, Jr.

[www.kingdominbible.com](http://www.kingdominbible.com)

I assume you are reading this “digest” because (a) you have complete confidence in the Bible as God’s revelation, (b) you want to understand what the Bible says about God’s kingdom. The kingdom is the theme that ties the Bible together. The Gospel of Matthew alone mentions it by name over fifty times! Jesus’ title *Christ (Messiah)* means He will rule in it. *Most studies in my website show what the Bible says about it.* I will list some of them on the next page.

**We generally agree about Old Testament kingdom teaching.** There are two aspects of God’s kingdom: (a) His eternal rule over everything, which never changes, and (b) His rule through men, which does change. The latter is what the Bible is all about—the origin and history of God’s kingdom on earth. The Book of Genesis tells how God created heaven and earth as a stage for man to rule as His representative. He chose Abraham and miraculously multiplied him into the nation called Israel. The Book of Exodus tells how He brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt to Mt. Sinai, where He established them as His kingdom. The rest of the Old Testament is the story of that rule. Because Israel was so unfaithful, the kingdom was finally suspended, just as God’s prophets predicted. But they also predicted its future restoration under the rule of a descendant of King David. It would come down from heaven to earth (so Jews often called it “the kingdom of heaven,” as in Matthew). The world capital would be Jerusalem. Israel would be restored, liberated, and made the head of the nations. The nations would live in justice and peace. Even deserts would blossom and the curse be forgotten.

**We don’t all agree about what the Gospels teach.** No one denies that the kingdom “drew near” and stayed near during most of Jesus’ ministry. Also, His works of power and healing fit the prophets’ predictions. But did the kingdom begin? Certainly not, according to the Jews. Even godly Jews did not see what they were told to expect:

- “the throne of David” restored for Mary’s child, as the angel promised (Luke 1:32)
- “salvation from our [Israel’s] enemies,” as Zechariah foretold (Luke 1:71)
- “every tree that does not produce good fruit...cut down and thrown into the fire,” as John the Baptist warned (Luke 3:9)

Nevertheless, many interpreters assume that God would not bring the kingdom near without starting it. They quote Jesus’ claim: “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28). But that simply meant that it was present *in Jesus while He was ministering*, not that He started it. Those who insist that it did start have to drastically differ from prophetic descriptions.

**The kingdom was “postponed.”** Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus ever defined the kingdom. They counted on God’s nation Israel to understand. God chose Israel and will never reject them (Rom. 11:1, 29). They were the representatives of all mankind before God, the most prepared people. They were His kingdom before—and to them He offered it again when Jesus came. But Israel did not like His offer! Not because they lacked evidence. Jesus showed all the power and wisdom needed to establish the kingdom as predicted, “to make all things new.” In Him the kingdom touched earth; it was “in their midst.” But Israel was deeply offended when John and Jesus preached that they must repent and be transformed. They were not good enough; they “must be born again.” But they refused to repent. So they were concluding that Jesus could not be the promised King. Though “large crowds” followed Him (Matt. 13:2), He knew they would

be fickle. So Jesus revealed to His disciples that—from man’s perspective—the kingdom would be postponed. He would come to establish it only after an unforeseen period of preparation.

**In Jesus’ “secrets” the kingdom was the climax.** Jesus hid these revelations from most of Israel. He taught them with parables that He explained only to His disciples. Sometimes He used a common rabbinic introduction (“[My subject] is like...”) that some misunderstand. For example, “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed...” (Matt. 13:24). This meant that the parable was about God’s kingdom from heaven (as the Jews expected). But it did not mean that the kingdom was like the first thing mentioned, “a man.” Instead, as Jesus Himself explained, it would be established in “the harvest...at the end of the age” (13:39-40). Not at the beginning or middle of the parable, but at the end—in the grand conclusion. Remember that this is the only interpretation we are given of a “kingdom-is-like” parable. Therefore, we should assume that the kingdom is at the same position—still future—in all such parables.

**Why was the kingdom delayed?** The reasons became clear later. Above all, it made it possible for Messiah to suffer and die for sins, then go to heaven until time to rule. From there He builds His kingdom assembly, the church, by “baptizing” disciples in God’s Spirit. Why didn’t God reveal the “secrets” to His earlier prophets? Why did Jesus explain them only to disciples? To give Israel an uncluttered choice to repent and humbly accept God’s kingdom as offered. Since they did not find out that the kingdom would be postponed, the issue stayed the same. And their answer to God was *no*. So they *killed Messiah Himself!* Since Israel represented all the nations, they made this choice for us all. Through them we all offered “the Lamb of God,” the only sacrifice that can open the door of salvation (the kingdom) for us. If we accept Jesus as King, we get the benefits of that sacrifice—and all He is and does.

After revealing that the kingdom was in effect postponed, Jesus began preparing His disciples for His absence. He encouraged them when they finally confessed that He is Messiah, the Ruler. He announced His coming death and resurrection. He repeatedly predicted His glorious return to reign. He revealed, just before His final arrival at Jerusalem, that the kingdom was not still near. He would go to heaven to get it, then return with it. On no occasion did He confuse this present evil age with the coming age of the kingdom. Neither does any passage in the Epistles. Neither should we. His return and His coming kingdom are still our greatest hope and concern!

### **Some of my studies that may help understand the kingdom:**

**A broad survey:** “Christ’s Coming Kingdom” (also being updated)

**Its relation to creation and to the Abrahamic covenant:** “Genesis Self-study Guide;” “Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?”

**Its original installation over Israel:** Relevant sections in “Thessalonians” and “Hebrews”

**Prophetic descriptions of its future:** My study guides for Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; also, “Psalm 2” and “Will God Eternally Bless Ethnic Israel? A Critique of Replacement Theology”

**Its drawing near in Jesus’ first advent:** “The Four Gospels: The Kingdom Offered & Postponed;” “Matthew Self-Study Guide” (or “Matthew 5-7,” etc.); “What Kingdom of God Did Jesus Proclaim in Luke?” “Did Jesus Establish His Kingdom?” “The Church and the Kingdom”

**In apostolic preaching and teaching:** “Evangelistic Sermons in Acts;” “A Survey of Romans;” “Thessalonians;” “Hebrews Study Guide & Commentary;” “First Peter;” “*Basilea...*”

**Its final coming:** “Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?” Revelation 20-22 (“A New Heaven & A New Earth”); “Survey of Revelation” (nearly ready 2/2012)