

# Kingdom Studies Digest

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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 at the end.

**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, history, and future 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 to channel His blessing 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. Israel was so unfaithful that God finally suspended His kingdom, just as His prophets predicted. But they also predicted its future restoration under a descendant of King David sitting on David’s throne. 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 liberated, restored, and made the head of the nations. The nations would live in justice and peace. Even deserts would blossom and the curse be forgotten. Forever and forever. These kingdom promises and descriptions were common and well known to Jews.

**Teaching in the Gospels.** John the Baptist and Jesus gave the same repeated announcement to God’s people Israel: “Repent, for the kingdom...has drawn near” (Greek, Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Since they did not define the kingdom, they confirmed the Jews’ understanding. Yet, Jesus did not proceed to establish the kingdom that had been predicted. So some say His kingdom is purely “spiritual.” Indeed, He spoke of spiritual requirements to enter it (Matt. 5:3-10, 20). But His descriptions of the coming kingdom did not lack material and political elements (Matt. 8:11; 19:28-29). Furthermore, He gave overwhelming evidence that He could “make all things new,” as the prophets had predicted. His works were “powers [miracles] of the coming age” (Heb. 6:5). In Him the kingdom touched earth; it was “in their midst.” But those works did not outlast the apostles. They validated the King and His legates but gave no evidence of a lasting kingdom. The kingdom drew near but did not begin. Godly Jews still had to look for

- “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)

So the kingdom as described by prophets and expected by godly Jews did not show up. It was still future in Acts and the Epistles (with only two or three verses that could be interpreted otherwise). So why did Jesus claim, “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28)? Simply because the kingdom as predicted was present in Jesus while He was ministering, not that He established it.

**The kingdom seemed to get “postponed.”** God’s nation Israel is the key. He chose Israel and will never reject them (Rom. 11:1, 29). They understood God’s terms; the “covenants” and “promises” were theirs (Rom. 9:5). They were the representatives of all mankind before God, the most prepared people. They had been His kingdom before—and to them He offered it again. But Israel did not like His offer! They did not lack evidence. Jesus showed all the power and wisdom needed to establish the kingdom as predicted, “to make all things new.” But they deeply resented John and Jesus preaching that they must repent and be transformed. That they were not good enough and “must be born again” (John 3:7). “They did not repent” (Matt. 11:20). Instead, they concluded that their King was an imposter—and eventually crucified Him (Matt. 27:22, 37).

Jesus knew this would (had to) happen, even when “large crowds” were following Him (Matt. 13:2). So He began using a new method of teaching. He told parables that embodied “secrets” about the kingdom, then explained them only to His disciples. That way He revealed previously unrevealed facts to those with spiritual ears but not to hardened Israel (Matt. 13:9-17). What were those facts? Mainly, that though His present ministry did not look successful, it inaugurated a period of preparation that would culminate in the kingdom at His *second coming*. This meant that from man’s perspective the promised glorious kingdom would be postponed. But from God’s perspective, it was just as He had planned!

**In Jesus’ “secrets” parables the kingdom was the climax.** Sometimes He used a common rabbinic introduction which may be confusing. The first time He did so was in the second parable (Matt. 13:24-30), which begins, “*The kingdom of heaven is like* a man who sowed good seed...” Everybody knew that the rabbi began by introducing his theme: here, the kingdom. But he did not mean to identify his theme with the first thing mentioned but with something else! In other words, Jesus does not here identify the kingdom with “a man” but with something later in the parable. This is no guess. Scripture provides us the Lord’s own interpretation (in Matt. 13:36-43), which serves as a model for such parables. In it Jesus identifies many items (the sower, the field, the weeds, etc.) from that parable. But though He identifies the good seed as “the sons of the kingdom” (v. 38), the kingdom itself does not appear until “the harvest...at the end of the age” (vv. 39-40). Not at the beginning or middle of the parable, but at the end—in the grand conclusion. From this model we should assume that the kingdom is at the same position—still future—in every parable of that kind.

**Why did God let Israel think Messiah would start the kingdom without delay?** In other words, why did He not previously reveal Messiah’s two comings? No earlier prophet knew it, not even John the Baptist (1 Peter 1:10-12). And even when Jesus revealed the apparent delay, He explained it only to disciples and not to all Israel. Why not? Here are two reasons:

- This kept Israel’s choice uncluttered. Knowing nothing about two comings or a “delayed” kingdom, they should have repented and humbly accepted God’s offer. Instead, they refused and killed Messiah Himself! The guilt was not just theirs. As representative of all the nations, they made this choice for us all. Through Israel we all offered “the Lamb of God,” the only sacrifice that can open the door of salvation (the kingdom) for us.
- This 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 (Matt. 3:11; 16:18; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). The door has opened

for us Gentiles (Rom. 11:11-12). 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!

**Links to Some of My Kingdom Studies**  
**in**  
[www.kingdominbible.com](http://www.kingdominbible.com)

**A broad survey:** “[Christ’s Coming Kingdom: A Survey of Bible Teaching about the Kingdom](#)” (also being updated); “[Revelation Survey](#).”

**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:** “[First & Second Thessalonians](#)”; “[Hebrews Study Guide & Commentary](#).”

**Prophetic descriptions of its future:** “[Psalm 2](#)”; “[Isaiah Study Guide](#)”; “[Jeremiah Study Guide](#)”; “[Ezekiel Study Guide](#)”; “[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](#)”; “[Keys to the Sermon on the Mount—Matthew 5-7](#)” (and others on Matthew); “[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](#)”; “[The Mystery of Christ’ in Ephesians](#)”; “[First & Second Thessalonians](#)”; “[Hebrews Study Guide & Commentary](#)”; “[Comments on 1 Peter](#)”; “[BASILEIA for the Kingdom of God: Acts & Epistles](#).”

**Its final coming:** “[Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?](#)”; “[Genesis Self-Study Guide](#)”; “[Revelation Survey](#)”; “[A New Heaven and A New Earth](#)” (Revelation 20-22).