

The Kingdom of God

The Prophesied Kingdom

1. Isaiah prophesied concerning the kingdom of God.¹ Isaiah 11:3-5 says that the Messiah will bring righteousness and justice upon the earth.² Read Isaiah 11:6-9 and 25:6-8. What other characteristics of the kingdom are mentioned in these passages?³



- ❑ In about 5 BC, a baby was born, named Jesus. He was a son of Abraham – *the* seed of Abraham through whom all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. He was the fulfillment of the Law. The Law pointed to Him. Jesus was *the* High Priest, and *the* final atoning sacrifice. His death on the cross provided a way for forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation (restored relationship) between God and human beings from every nation, resulting in a new people of God. Jesus was the son of David, who would rule over God's kingdom forever.

The Proclaimed Kingdom

- ❑ John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah Jesus. He proclaimed, "Repent (turn from your sins and turn to God), for the kingdom of heaven is near"⁴ (*Matthew 3:2*).
- ❑ When Jesus began his public ministry, he also proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (*Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15*). He told his disciples to preach the same message (*Matthew 10:7*).

The Present Kingdom

- ❑ When Jesus was accused of driving out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus replied that he cast out demons by the Spirit of God. He said, "if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (*Matthew 12:28, NIV*).⁵

¹ Most scholars date Isaiah's prophetic ministry around 740-690 BC.

² Associated with the Messiah's reign is Israel's return to the promised land (Isaiah 11:10-16). The Bible records a partial return between 537 and 445 BC, but this falls short of Isaiah's prophesy, as well as numerous other prophecies (e.g. Jeremiah 32:37-38; 33:1-13; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Amos 9:11-15). So how are these prophecies fulfilled? Bible scholars differ. Dispensationalists say that the prophecies concerning the land will be literally fulfilled in the millennial kingdom, and apply specifically to ethnic Israel (see "Kingdom Definitions" on page 3). Some say that Israel's establishment as a state in 1948 is part of this fulfillment. Other scholars say that God's promise of the physical land (in Palestine) was conditional, and its realization was forfeited by Israel's disobedience and rebellion. Covenant theologians tend to see the prophecies as pointing to a greater fulfillment in the new heaven and the new earth, which is the final state of the kingdom of God (Revelation 21:1-2). Some covenant theologians see a future earthly millennial kingdom, while others do not. For more information, see *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, edited by Robert C. Clouse (InterVarsity Press, 1977).

³ Isaiah 11:6-9 reveals the characteristics of peace, security and safety, pictured by a little child/infant playing with previously ferocious and dangerous animals (likely figurative). The earth will be full of the knowledge of God. Isaiah 25:6-8 says the kingdom will involve "all peoples" (not just ethnic Jews; but people from every nation, tribe, & tongue). Characteristics include great enjoyment. God will destroy the "shrouds; sheets" – symbols of mourning. Death will be "swallowed up forever" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54), and God will wipe away the tears from all faces.

⁴ "is near" (ἤγγικεν, *ēngiken*) – literally, "has drawn near," probably pointing to the kingdom's arrival.

⁵ "has come" (ἐφθασεν, *ephthasen*) – the kingdom has arrived and is present. The kingdom "has come" because the King (Messiah Jesus) has arrived. The kingdom, as "the dynamic reign of God," is not yet visible, but can be realized in the hearts of those who submit their lives to the King.

- ❑ Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you (or ‘in your midst’)” (*Luke 17:20-21, NIV*).⁶
- ❑ Thus Jesus indicated that the kingdom was present in some way. But Jesus also said things that indicated that the kingdom was future.⁷

The Future Kingdom

- ❑ When Jesus was eating the last supper with his disciples, “he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes’” (*Luke 22:17-18, NIV*).
2. Read Revelation 21:1-5 & 22:1-5.⁸ What characteristics of the kingdom are mentioned in these passages?⁹



Entering the Kingdom¹⁰

- To enter the kingdom, we must humble ourselves and have sincere, dependent trust in God. (*Matthew 18:2-4; Luke 18:16-17*).
- To enter the kingdom, we must repent (that is, turn from our sin, and turn toward God). (*Matthew 21:28-32*)
- To enter the kingdom, we must be “born again” or “born from above” (*John 3:3-18*) In other words, we must receive “new life” from God through faith in Jesus Christ. (*John 3:16*)
- We do not enter the kingdom based on *our* righteousness, but by God’s grace through faith, but true faith is evidenced by self-surrender to God’s rule. (*Matthew 19:16-30*)
- Not everyone who claims to be a Christian will enter the kingdom. (*Matthew 7:21-23*)¹¹
- Entering the kingdom involves perseverance in the faith despite hardships and trials. (*Acts 14:21-22*)

⁶ “is within you” (εντος ὑμων εστιν, *entos hymōn estin*) – perhaps better translated “is in your midst” or “is in your presence.” That is, the kingdom is in their presence because Jesus, the King, is in their presence. If the phrase means “is within you,” it may mean that the kingdom is spiritual and internal, rather than physical and external.

⁷ If we continue to read in Luke 17 (verses 22-37), it is obvious that something more needs to happen.

⁸ It should be noted that these verses refer to the final state of the kingdom of God. “Premillennialists” believe that a “millennial kingdom” (Revelation 20:1-6) will precede the final state - the new heaven and the new earth.

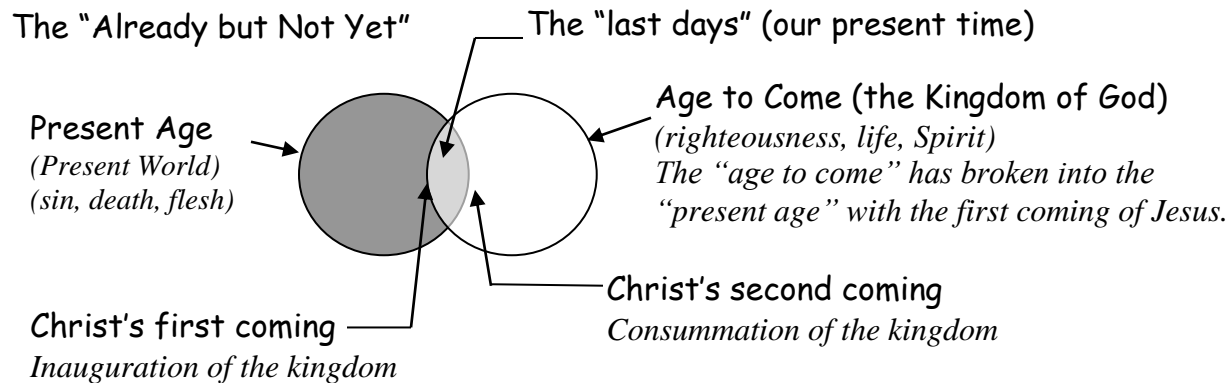
⁹ Revelation 21:1-5: The kingdom is totally new. Isaiah also spoke of a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17). God will dwell with his people (remember the new covenant, Jeremiah 31:33-34). Verse 3 says that they will be his “peoples” (plural – *laoi* instead of *laos*). The effects of sin (death, crying, pain) will be abolished (cf. Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54). Revelation 22:1-5: The flowing river symbolizes eternal life flowing from God. The “tree of life” (Genesis 2:9) will provide fruit to eat continuously. The curse (due to sin) will be removed. They will “see his face,” representing the ultimate relationship with God (Matthew 5:8; 1 John 3:2). God’s presence/glory will provide the light (cf. Isaiah 60:19-20). They will “reign forever” (when God created the earth, he said, “let them rule over [the creation]” (Genesis 1:26). The future kingdom will bring restoration of the harmony and purpose experienced in the Garden (Genesis 1:31), but it will be much better. It will last forever.

¹⁰ The passages that follow were found by doing a search with the words “enter” and “kingdom.”

¹¹ Many who claim to be “Christian” are not genuine. They are not truly “born from above.” For example, in the U.S., many professing Christians are mere “cultural Christians” (claiming to be Christian because of family identification or church attendance). But they do not bear the “fruit” of genuine Christianity (Matthew 7:16-20).

Our Relation to the Kingdom

3. According to the Bible, the kingdom of God has come, but it is also future. How can this be?



Reflection/Application

- Only those whose names are written in "the book of life" will enter the kingdom of God (*Revelation 20:11-15*). Is your name written in the book of life? Review "Entering the Kingdom" (on the previous page) and reflect on the criteria for inclusion in the book of life.
- For the Christian, realization of the kingdom is both present and future. In what specific ways is God's reign evident in your life today? Read Romans 8:18-25. As you face difficulties in your life, how can the hope of the future kingdom help?

Kingdom Definitions

- ❑ **Kingdom** – the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God, and derivatively, the sphere in which the rule is realized.
- ❑ **Millennium (Millennial Kingdom)** – the period of time referred to in Revelation 20. There are various interpretations of the "millennium" relative to the eternal kingdom described in Revelation 21:1-22:5. The three most common views are defined below:¹²
 - **Dispensational Premillennial View** – Christ will return and establish a visible, earthly kingdom for 1000 years, prior to the new heaven and new earth of the eternal kingdom. The prophecies concerning Israel's return to the promised land will be literally fulfilled in the Millennium. Thus ethnic Israel has a distinct position in the Millennium.
 - **Covenant Premillennial View** – Christ will return and establish a visible, earthly kingdom for "1000 years,"¹³ prior to the new heaven and new earth of the eternal kingdom. The prophecies concerning Israel's return to the promised land are fulfilled in the Church. Thus ethnic Israel is not necessarily distinct in the Millennium.
 - **Amillennial View** – the millennium describes the present kingdom. Christ will return and establish the new heaven and new earth of the eternal kingdom. There will be no temporal, earthly kingdom prior to the final state of the eternal kingdom.

¹² It may be difficult to decide which view is best. However, all Christians should accept the fundamental teaching that Christ will visibly return; judge the world; and establish his everlasting, glorious kingdom. Another major view (not listed above) is the "Postmillennial View," which says the millennium describes a prolonged period of peace and prosperity prior to Christ's return, brought about by Christianization of the world. This view has declined in popularity, and in my opinion, has the least biblical support of the four major views.

¹³ According to this view, the "1000 years" is not necessarily a literal 1000 years.