

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

OVERVIEW

Ex. 19:6	God's desire was to have a kingdom of priests but it was contingent on their obedience.
Dt. 9:16, 17; 28:25 Mt. 21:42-44	Israel failed and brought in God's judgment
1 Sam. 13:13	God's future plan promised in David's greater Son
Dan. 2:31-35	God's plan unfolded in the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's vision by Daniel
Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 12:28	The kingdom of God was preached by John, then Jesus when He was here
Mt. 5; 6 & 7	The Sermon on the Mount gives the moral characteristics suitable to the Kingdom
Mt. 13	The seven similitudes of the Kingdom give a dispensational outline during the present time
Mt. 18	The principles and order of the Kingdom
Mt. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:10-27	Man's responsibility in the kingdom
Jn. 1:13; 3:3-16 Rom. 14:17 Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:13 2 Pet. 1:11	The kingdom of God viewed morally

In **Daniel 2: 44** it is predicted that "In the days of these kings [the ten divisions of the fourth kingdom, the revived Roman Empire] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever:" cf. also **Dan. 7**. The 'kingdom of heaven' was announced by John the Baptist and by the Lord as 'at hand' (**Matt. 3: 2; Matt. 4: 17**), but the Lord declared that the 'kingdom of God' had come. **Matt. 12: 28**. In many respects the two expressions are identical in the synoptic gospels, but the 'kingdom of heaven' occurs in the gospel by Matthew only and refers to the *rule* of that which God has set in heaven, and commenced when Christ went to heaven. The term 'kingdom of God' is more connected with the *moral* state established in man and was here when Christ was here.

The parables in the gospels describe the *form and objects* of the kingdom while the Lord is away. In **Matt. 13** the Lord spoke four parables to the multitude; then He dismissed the people and explained the parable of the Wheat and the Tares to His disciples and added three parables bearing on the secret character of the kingdom. It is shown that evil would be found in the kingdom, but that Christ will eventually send His angels to gather out of His kingdom all things that offend; then it will be established in power by the Lord Jesus sitting on His own throne, and reigning supreme as Son of man over the earth, ending by His ultimately giving up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. **1 Cor. 15: 24, 28**. The moral characteristics suitable to the kingdom are given in the Sermon on the Mount **Matt. 5-7**, and its principles and order in **Matt. 18**.

The Jews having refused their king, the kingdom was not set up in manifestation at that time and it is still held in abeyance. In the meanwhile it is 'the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.' **Rev. 1: 9**. Christ is represented as having gone to receive a kingdom, and to return. **Luke 19: 12**. In the meantime the kingdom has been produced, and goes on in its *mysterious* form: cf. **Matt. 13: 11**. There are multitudes who profess obedience to God and to the Lord Jesus, and who look to heaven as the throne from whence come all their blessings, while they are passing through a world of which Satan is the god and prince; and to the saints the kingdom of God is very real.

They by faith anticipate the kingdom in power. Righteousness, peace, and joy characteristics of the kingdom are already theirs in the Holy Ghost, **Rom. 14: 17**. In this sense the kingdom of God is often referred to in the Epistles. A person must be born anew to enter into it, **John 3: 3, 5**, but this idea, is distinct from the *form* which the kingdom has taken, and the *dimensions* it has attained in the hands of man.

The Kingdom of God is described by **TEN DISTINCTIVE TITLES**.

#	TITLE	VERSE	COMMENT
1	Kingdom	Mt.6:10; 13:38	General description of heaven's rule.
2	Kingdom of Heaven	Mt. only	Kingdom after Christ went to heaven and emphasizes the rule of the heavens.
3	Kingdom of God	Mark; Luke; John	The Kingdom morally in Christ dwelling in the midst of man.
4	Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ	Rev. 1:9; Mt. 13:11	The Kingdom currently in "mystery" while the King is in heaven.
5	Kingdom of Christ and God	Eph. 5:5	Emphasizes the moral character of the Kingdom.
6	Kingdom of His dear Son	Col. 1:13	Emphasizes the preciousness and privilege to be brought into the Kingdom.
7	His Kingdom	1 Thess. 2:12	Emphasizes the responsibility to walk worthy.
8	Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ	2 Pet. 1:11	Emphasizes faithfulness to achieve and abundant entrance.
9	Kingdom of the Father	Mt. 13:43; 26:29	Heavenly portion of the Kingdom
10	Kingdom of the Son of Man	Mt. 16:28	Earthy portion of the Kingdom

DANIEL (THE KINGDOMS OF MEN)

In the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, we have the whole course of Gentile dominion from the kingdom of Babylon till the revival of the Roman Empire (the kingdoms of men) which will be the last kingdom in the times of the Gentiles. The **STONE** cut out without hands brings this image to an end introducing the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is the stone cut out without hands — meaning without human aid — Who, at His appearing and kingdom will bring to an end to all of these kingdoms. His kingdom will fill the whole earth.

Nebuchadnezzar's image shows deterioration in value in the metals used to describe the various kingdoms giving us the divine estimation of the decreasing glory in the kingdoms of men.

First we have the gold as representing **BABYLON**; the kingdom in its best estate as given to Nebuchadnezzar by God, **v. 32, 37**.

Second the silver represents the **MEDIA-PERSIAN**, **v. 32, 39**

Third the brass represents the **GRECIAN**, **v. 32, 39**

Last the iron represents **ROME PAST**, and the iron and clay of the toes, **ROME FUTURE v. 32, 40-43**

Also Daniel tells, in the subsequent visions given to him, that one head controlled the Babylonian empire; **Dan. 2: 37**, two horns controlled the Media-Persian; **Dan. 8: 3**, four heads ultimately controlled the Grecian empire; **Dan.**

7: 6, and seven heads controlled the Roman empire in its original form; **Rev. 17:7, 9**, while ten horns or toes will control it in its future revival, **Rev. 13: 1, Dan. 2: 7 42**.

Almost all known types of government are seen:

First, absolute **AUTOCRACY** is seen in Nebuchadnezzar **then MONARCHY** is seen in the Media-Persian but not the absolute autocracy of Babylon. **Then** in the Grecian empire, dividing into four heads, we have **OLIGARCHY**. **Then** in Rome past we have **IMPERIALISM** while in the ten toes or horns in Rome future we have **DEMOCRACY**. All of these signs show the decrease in power and a glory. So God foretold of this degeneration by clearly stamping it on this image. Man may boast of progress in his character of rule but the Scriptures give the divine estimation. The last phase of the image will be in the future when the ten kings receive power one hour with the beast. It will be in this state that Christ appears, and as the **STONE** smites the image on the feet, destroying this power bringing to an end forever Gentile dominion. He will set up His kingdom which will stand forever, **v. 44**. He will not take possession of the earth through any Gentile power but will take it through Israel when they come into their rightful place in the kingdom of the Son of Man.

If in **Daniel 2** we have an outline of the **HISTORY** of the times of the Gentiles, in **Daniel 4** we have an outline of the **moral state PRIDE**, described in God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar and in **Daniel 7** the terrible underlying **VIOLENCE** depicted in the lion, the bear, the leopard and the beasts. Nebuchadnezzar could say, "Is not this great Babylon, that **I** have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of **my** power, and for the honour of **my** majesty?" **v. 30**. As the psalmist states "God is not in all his thoughts" **Ps. 10: 4**. Man instead of ascribing glory to God, accredits all to himself and the very power put into his hands by God was used to persecute the saints and put to death the Son of God. This is pictured in the three in the furnace and Daniel in the den later. So it has ever been that power put into the hands of any fallen son of Adam will be used to exalt himself and he will dare to use it against the saints of God and even God Himself. Hence God's chastisement was upon Nebuchadnezzar. It is a fitting picture of the turmoil amongst the nations today. What is God seeking to teach these men?

"That the most high rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will."

When will they learn this lesson? When, like this king, they lift up their eyes to heaven, **v. 34**. Their understanding will then return and instead of praising themselves they will bless, and praise, and honour the Most High. The very experience through which the king passed was to teach him that, "the heavens do rule" **v. 26**. This goes beyond earth for God is in sovereign control of the universe, both heaven and earth. "And He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?" If then in **v. 17** we read He "**setteth up**", we read also in **v. 37**, "He is **able to abase**". God sets up and God puts down — He alone is sovereign in the universe.

MATTHEW 13

"Matthew only uses the expression "kingdom of heaven!" It is often, in a general sense, capable of being interchanged with the "kingdom of God" as we see by comparing Luke's gospel. Notwithstanding, the two phrases cannot always replace each other, and Matthew uses the "kingdom of God" in a few passages where the "kingdom of heaven" could not be used. (**Matt. 6: 33; Matt. 13: 38; Matt. 21: 43**). Also the "kingdom of God" was here when Christ the King was here but the "kingdom of heaven" began with Christ **going to heaven**. By and by, when Satan ceases to rule, it will be the "kingdom of the heavens", not in mystery, but in manifestation. The "kingdom of God" has also a moral force, which the "kingdom of the heavens" has not; and in this way it is frequently used by Paul, and was peculiarly suitable to the Spirit's design in Luke." (JND) See **Rom. 14:17**

Following the outline of the kingdom in its widest form, we come now to regard it in a more restricted way, **dispensationally**, as presented to us in the seven parables in **Matthew 13**.

Here we have an outline of the whole Christian profession which begins with the ministry of Christ in the parable of **THE SOWER** and then on the day of Pentecost after the Lord was in heaven with the Wheat and the Tares which continues till the end of this age.

Beginning with only good seed, it became a mixture of good and bad with the resolving of this taking place when the saints are taken to heaven and the rest is left for judgment in this world. As this character only came into existence after Christ is in heaven, the kingdom is looked at **as in mystery** for we have a kingdom without a visible king. It is an aspect that only those who have eyes to see can understand, hence our Lord spoke to them of the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," **v. 11**.

We must note that the first parable was not called a similitude of the kingdom, though there can be little doubt it prepared for them. The Sower rather covered the later part of the ministry of our Lord and only came in after His rejection by Israel. He accepts His rejection in **Matt. 11** and formally rejects the nation in **Matt. 12**, then, He begins a new work as the Sower, not this time with Israel in view but with the Assembly in view for this is bound up with these parables. Moreover, we have no mention of a "field" in this parable which our Lord says "is the world" and His work did not go beyond the confines of Palestine.

The kingdom as outlined in the other six parables did not begin till Christ was in glory. This is clearly seen in the next parable where the field is in the hands of men. No doubt the sowing by our Lord produced the company who received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and it was to them the care of the field was committed and it has been in the care of men ever since. In support of this we note that "The field," **v. 38**, becomes "his field," **v. 24**, and "thy field," **v. 27**. When did **the** field become **His** field? Surely it was when He sold all that He hath and bought it; a reference to the death of our Lord.

So in the **WHEAT AND THE TARES** it speaks of "his field" and indicates that the kingdom had its beginning after the cross and the coming of the Holy Spirit into this world with Peter's two keys (**Acts 2 & 10**).

In the first similitude of the kingdom, beginning in **v. 24**, we see the introduction of the kingdom into this world by our Lord — the Sower — then through the apostles called "men". It was while **they slept** — not the Sower — that the enemy sowed tares among the wheat. Here is the secret of all the evil that is found in the bosom of Christendom to-day. Both wheat and tares growing together as far as the kingdom is concerned and this state will abide till the end of the age. At the end of this age the angels will come forth and bind the tares together to burn them, and the Lord will gather His own to Himself. The order is, first the tares bundled, then the wheat gathered into the barn, then lastly at the end of the tribulation the tares burned after the wheat has been taken away. This is all in preparation for the righteous to shine forth, "as the sun" **v. 43**.

"At the close, He will bind all of the enemy's work in bundles; that is, He will **prepare** them in this world for judgment. He will then take away the church." (J.N.D. Synopsis, vol. 3, page 93)

While speaking of the Assembly being bound up with these parables, we must not fail to distinguish between the kingdom and the Assembly. There is no thought of good and bad in the Assembly as seen clearly as we follow our Lord's teaching in the other parables.

Next we have the parable of **THE MUSTARD TREE**, **v. 31**. This shows to us the kingdom of heaven becoming a great world power though of quite a small beginning. No doubt affiliation with the political powers has brought this about. So worldly has the Kingdom in mystery become that the Devil and his angels are firmly established therein. The word of the Lord to Pergamos clearly states this, they were dwelling where Satan's throne is, **Rev. 2: 13**. For the full result of this, we have to turn to **Rev. 18: 2**, "the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." The kingdom is rapidly becoming thus.

Then in the next parable of **THE WOMAN HIDING THE LEAVEN** in the three measures of meal, we are given to see that along with external greatness there is internal corruption. No doubt the two go together. Comparing this with **Zech. 5: 5-11**, where the "ephah" is the same measure as three measures — three seahs — idolatry is clearly

intimated, and we believe will be seen in its full-blown character when apostate Christendom bows down to the image of the beast. The fact of the simile of the "woman" being used refers to the Babylonish character of things and, running these two similitudes together, it is the scarlet beast being ridden by the woman clothed in purple and scarlet. Such will be the end as the result of the tares being left after the wheat is safely in heaven. It is of interest to note that all these parables were given by our Lord publicly, outside of the house, and refer to the character of the kingdom as seen publicly in this world. He has much more of this instruction to pass on to them but the rest He speaks to them inside the house for, if all this serious corrupt condition needed to be pointed out, there is much of a very blessed character to pass on to them but this is now for those only who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Explanations are given inside the house and we may be deeply thankful that we are permitted to hear our Lord explaining what He had said to the multitude and adding for **their ears alone**. The next three parables where all that is vital and precious to His heart is opened out to them. In this connection it is well to remind ourselves that our Lord is not only the "field" owner; He is also "the householder," v. 27. It is not quite by surveying the "field" that we are taught about the mysteries of the kingdom, but rather by coming to the householder for an explanation. The result is that we ourselves will become householders, v. 52, and thus able to teach others also. But the rest we must leave for another time.

The first three (already considered briefly) show the pretentious character of the kingdom in this world as seen by all; these things being the direct outcome of the tares sown among the wheat. Now however, we hear from the lips of our Lord that in spite of all this false manifestation, there is that in the kingdom which is valuable to Him, no doubt the outcome of the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying. This chapter teaches as clearly as words can teach that all that is spurious in this kingdom will be burned up, and all that is good will be in heaven (vv. 30, 43), a place where neither Israel nor the nations will be.

In this first parable of the **TREASURE HID IN THE FIELD** we have God's dealing with the earth namely Israel. Nothing corrupting is seen here at all but rather great joy. The Lord Jesus who is the "Man", come to earth in His omniscient wisdom found the treasure hid. Israel had been scattered and hid in the world for centuries and only a small part of the nation was in the land. **Exodus 19:4** contains a promise to Israel that on the basis of keeping the Law they would be a "peculiar treasure" to the Lord and in **Psalms 135:4** we find God's counsel regarding Israel, "the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto Himself and Israel for His peculiar treasure". By going to the cross the Lord Jesus purchased the world and therefore the treasure is His by purchase. This reminds us of Abraham purchasing the field from Ephron the Hittite in which to bury Sarah (a type of Israel). **Genesis 23:16-20** Israel has been hid again until the Lord takes up His jewels. **Mal. 3:17**

But the next parable, of **THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE**, so well known to us brings out the Assembly in her own distinctiveness as the "one pearl of great price," v. 46. Should doubt arise as to this, one passage in **Rev. 21: 21**, where every gate is of "one pearl," show her value and preciousness to the One who bought it. We have long understood that the twenty four elders are composed of all the heavenly company, and this we suggest is the answer to the treasure; but when we come to the "marriage of the Lamb" in **Rev. 19: 7**, the Assembly is there seen in her own distinctiveness and the rest of the heavenly company called to have fellowship in the event. After this ceremony the twenty-four elders are never seen again.

Lastly we have **THE PARABLE OF THE NET**, shows the means used to bring the kingdom into being. Again we are back to men, for it was through men the Lord sent out the gospel which has gathered the whole company called Christendom to-day, good and bad. We might notice that in the parable of the tares and the wheat we have "men" brought in. So we have in the "net," but with the "treasure" and the "pearl" no men are mentioned as taking part in this matter, this was all of Himself and will abide for His eternal pleasure and our eternal blessing.

It is the work of angels to deal with the bad and the work of men to deal with the good. Let us be active to secure and help that which is clearly good, and thus be found "fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God," **Col. 4: 11**.

Having learned from our Lord the bearing of these parables we shall be householders capable of bringing out of our treasures, "things new and old." Not things new and future, but things new and old i.e. the things of the kingdom of heaven in its mystery form as we are in it to-day, yet securing all the saints who will yet be in heaven at the coming of our Lord. His coming will bring this age to a close.

JOHN 3

The kingdom as it is presented in **John 3**, only living, spiritual believers who are born of God can ever enter into it. In the other three Gospels the kingdom as a sphere of profession is presented and this may be true or false; but here in John 3 only those born of God ever enter it, and children of the wicked one can never find entrance into it. It is composed only of those who are born of God and who believe in the Son, receiving as a result eternal life. **v. 16**

We read two things marked those who received the Son, they "believed on His Name," (**v. 12**), and they were "Born . . . of God," (**v. 13**). It is in this way living, spiritual believers are formed and brought into the kingdom.

There are four statements in this verse (**John 1: 13**), one is positive and three are negative. The one positive statement is "Which were born . . . of God." The three negative are, "not of blood"; "nor of the will of the flesh"; "nor of the will of man." These three things are the component parts of our human birth into this world. "Blood" would refer to the nature of that birth; "flesh" to the agent, and "man" as the source. This is what our Lord refers to in chapter 3, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." We learn that new birth is not the product of **nature**, nor brought about by the **flesh**, nor does it spring from **man**, but is altogether of God, "Which were born . . . of God." More details are given in John 3, as to the agents God does use to bring this about. In chapter 1, stress is laid upon what the new birth is not, while in chapter 3, stress is laid upon what it is and how it is brought about by God.

When Nicodemus came to our Lord seeking light, he was told at once that before anyone could see the kingdom of God he must be born anew. New birth was not needed to see a Man performing miracles; but to see the kingdom of God introduced in this spiritual way by Jesus needed a completely new work in the soul. Moreover, when he sought further light as to how these things could be, he was assured that this work could only be brought about by the word of God and by the Spirit. These are the agents that God uses to do a work, which not only opens the eyes of men, but begets within them a new moral and spiritual nature which fits them for entrance into the kingdom. Other servants are used to substantiate these things, James tells us in his epistle "Of His Own will begat He us with the word of truth," (**James 1: 18**). Peter speaks of , "Being born again. . . by the word of God," when he is speaking to the Jews who were formally in a relationship with God (**1 Peter 1: 23**). James has mostly in mind the source; Peter rather emphasizes the agents; John adds a further point, what it is in its nature — spirit.

The result of this work is shown in its completion in **John 3: 16**. Those who are born anew by the word and the Spirit believe on the Son, and thus enter the kingdom where they obtain Salvation and Eternal Life through the Son. However, it is certain that only as one is born again by the Word and the Spirit can one enter; no other person will find a place in this kingdom who is not thus wrought upon by God; John does not present the kingdom dispensationally as a sphere of profession, be it true or false. This is the kingdom in its vital and spiritual form; and only those born of God and having believed the gospel are sealed by the Spirit and have part therein. It is not the **sphere** of the kingdom but the kingdom morally/spiritually which is in view in this chapter.

EPISTLES

This is the aspect of the kingdom referred to in **Rom. 14: 17**. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." It is into this kingdom God has brought us by begetting us

anew and giving us of His Spirit. If in the meanwhile we are linked **outwardly** with much that is spurious in the sphere of the kingdom of heaven, the fact remains that we are true children of the kingdom, living and moving in the power of the Spirit of God. It is our privilege to walk subject to His will, manifesting clearly that we are such, being marked by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

DISTINCT FROM THE ASSEMBLY

The kingdom must not be confounded with the assembly. In the kingdom the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest; but in the assembly a wicked person is to be put out. **1 Cor. 5: 13**. There may appear to be a similarity between the assembly and the kingdom; but the ideas are not the same. The kingdom is the sphere of Christ's **rule**; whereas the assembly is the **dwelling place** of God by the Spirit. The duration on earth of the assembly and the kingdom are not the same; the kingdom will be set up in power after the rapture of the assembly, and will continue during the millennium.

The Christian, besides sharing in the privileges of the assembly, has also the privileges and responsibilities attaching to the kingdom. To each individual is entrusted a pound (**Luke 19: 12-24**) - **responsibility**; or, in another aspect, one or more talents (**Matt. 25: 14-28**) – according to **God's sovereignty**, which he is responsible to use for his Lord and Master, and for which he will have to give an account in a future day. His place in heaven is by grace apart from his works, but his reward in the kingdom will be according to his faithfulness to his Lord.