

The Kingdom

In our effort to understand Israel and The Mosaic Covenant, and how all this points to Christ as King, we need to spend some time on the Kingdom, or what we in the Church call the Millennium.

This term “Kingdom” gets thrown around a lot in Scripture and by pastors and teachers. What exactly does the term refer to? It isn’t just one thing, and that is what we are going to explore: that there are many kingdoms found in Scripture, how they are related, and what they mean.

While we will look at it in detail later, the main kingdom under view in this study is the one Jesus and John the Baptist referred to when they both said, “the Kingdom is at hand (or near).” That Kingdom is the one that Israel was expecting. It was, in their understanding, eternal and earthly and would be brought into being by the arrival of Messiah.

Christians also look forward to this same Kingdom but from a slightly different perspective. We see it as a period that is 1,000 years long that we call the “Millennium” (Rev 20), that changes at the end of that period into one that is indeed eternal but less earthly, less physical, and more heavenly. The first part, the 1,000 year Millennium, comes into being with the Second Advent of Jesus the Christ. In that, Christians are aligned with the Jewish traditional view of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom and Millennium/Kingdom are essentially the same thing but viewed from two different perspectives. For one, Christians have the benefit of all that New Testament revelation about the Kingdom that the Jews did not have. We will get into this in more detail later. Meanwhile, let’s explore some of the meanings behind this word “kingdom”.

The Universal Kingdom And The Mediatorial Kingdom

To have a kingdom one must first have a ruler with the right to rule; and second, one must have a realm to be ruled in terms of space and persons; and thirdly, one must have the actual exercise of the function of rulership by

the king over that which is ruled. All three aspects of a kingdom must simultaneously be present before one can be said to have a functioning kingdom. A king, a realm, and rulership.

The phrase 'kingdom of God' appears 15 times in the Old Testament (Ps 22:28; 103:19; 145:11-13; Obad 21; Dan 2:44; 4:3, 31; 6:26; 7:14, 18, 27; 1 Chr 17:14; 28:5; 29:11; 2 Chr 13:8). Using the above references with other Old Testament revelation, two overlapping yet distinguishable kingdoms of God can be identified, namely the universal kingdom of God and the mediatorial kingdom of God. What's the difference?

The Universal Kingdom of God

God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). All three aspects of a kingdom are simultaneously present: As Creator, God has every right to rule, the Father rules over all that has been created and He actively exercises the function of rulership. In summary, God rules! We define the universal or eternal Kingdom of God as God's macrocosmic rule through his exclusive, sovereign dominion over all of creation, a rule without pause or end.

According to Psalm 145:13, God's universal kingdom is everlasting. Psalm 103:19 states that God's kingdom is universal, for God rules over all. The universal kingdom of God is everlasting and universal over all in heaven and all on earth (1 Chr 29:11; Ps 103:19; 145:13).

If God's universal kingdom is over all eternally, can this kingdom come 'near' as offered by both John the Baptist and Jesus (cf. Mat 3:2; 4:17)? No, because this universal kingdom is active and everlasting plus covers the whole of creation, it is already "near" or "at hand".

Are Satan and his fallen angels a part of God's universal kingdom? Yes, they are, because God's universal kingdom includes **everything** that He created.

Are all created persons in the universal kingdom currently obeying God? Obviously not. Before any rebellion took place in the angelic world or in humankind, God's will was perfectly obeyed, on earth as it is in heaven. At

that time, the universal kingdom and the mediatorial kingdom were perfectly in line with God the Father's will.

Currently, God tolerates rebellion against His rule and allows it within certain limits, but this rebellion will not be allowed to continue forever. Sometime in the future, every knee will bow down and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10-11). At a certain future point, all rebellion will be removed.

1 Cor 15:28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

The Mediatorial Kingdom of God

Within God's Universal Kingdom, there is a smaller domain, namely the earth. God delegates to humankind the authority to rule over the earth on God's behalf.

Psalms 115:16 The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man.

Although God is enthroned in heaven over his Universal Kingdom, God has given human beings, which He created in His image, the task of ruling over the earth on his behalf (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8; Heb 2:5-8). Within the overarching Universal Kingdom of God, there exists a more limited kingdom, an earth-oriented and time-related kingdom, which can be called the Mediatorial Kingdom of God, mediatorial referring to a mediator or a go between, that being mankind.

Man's rulership over the Mediatorial Kingdom was lost when Adam sinned. Satan is now the ruler (1 Jo 5:19; 2 Cor 4:4; Jo 12:31; 14:30; Mat 4:8-9). After Adam's fall, God promised that He will restore humankind's kingdom rule over the earth (cf. Gen 3:15). Much of the Bible's storyline is about the Last Adam restoring what the First Adam lost.

The Mediatorial Kingdom of God on earth is characterized by two phases, namely the theocratic kingdom and then the Messianic kingdom. The

theocratic kingdom was an Israelitish kingdom over which God ruled. This kingdom came into existence at Mount Sinai but ceased when God's glory left the temple in Jerusalem (Ezek 8-11), when Israel was taken into Babylon. Since then, we are in the Times of the Gentiles. Nevertheless, the prophets prophesied to Israel that the Kingdom will be re-established.

This is the Kingdom that John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and the apostles offered to Israel. In Matthew and the other Gospels, the Kingdom offered to Israel was "at hand," that is it was at the point of being established, but first Israel had to repent and place her faith and trust in the King, the Lord Jesus Christ (Mat 3:2; 4:17; 10:5-7). Under the religious leadership of that time, however, "this generation" of Jews rejected Christ (Mat 11:16; 12:23-32, 39, 41-42, 45). As a result, the Messianic kingdom will only be established at Christ's second coming (cf. Mat 19:28; 23:39; 25:31, 34), which should be viewed as a restoration of the theocratic kingdom. This explains why the apostles asked Jesus, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The apostles were correct to expect the re-establishment of the theocratic kingdom, that is in the form of the Messianic kingdom, but wrong about the timing.

Acts 1:7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

Israel rejected the King and thus also rejected His Kingdom — at least temporarily. God then offered the spiritual aspects of the Kingdom to the Gentiles. Between Christ's first and second coming to the earth, He is building his Church, his bride, a body made up of believers from all the nations.

Among the many reasons the Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah was because they had turned their God-given religion into a system of works for salvation, and like all false teachings, it has its origins in misinterpretations of Scripture.

Romans 10:3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Theologian Charles Ryrie sums it up this way: "The **basis** of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the **requirement** for salvation in every age is faith; the **object** of faith in every age is God; the **content** of faith changes in the various dispensations [ages or times]."

The content of faith changes because of God progressively revealing His plan for the recovery by the Second Adam of what the First Adam lost in the Garden. The portion of God's plan that he intends to reveal to mankind was progressively revealed through the ages and not totally revealed until the completion of the Canon of Scripture at the end of the first century. There has been no new details of God's Plan revealed since John pinned Revelation at the end of the first century.

When He returns to the earth, the Lord Jesus Christ will establish the Messianic Kingdom and reign for a thousand years. Just as Adam and his wife was to rule over the earth, so Christ and his wife, the Church, will rule in the Millennium.

Other resurrected believers – be they Old Testament believers or believers that died during the Tribulation Period – will also receive authority from Christ to rule in the Millennium. Israel is an important part of God's plan in Christ, but the Messianic Kingdom is not meant for believing Jews only. Non-Jewish believers will also inherit the Kingdom (Mat 8:11-12; 25:34). Only believers will be allowed to enter the kingdom when Christ establishes it.

John 3:3 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

So-o-o many Kingdoms!

- Definition of a kingdom — Three elements are required —
 1. A ruler with the right to rule.
 2. A realm to be ruled in terms of space and persons.
 3. The actual exercise of the function of rulership.

- **Universal Kingdom** — God’s rule over all of creation. It is eternal without pause or end.
- **Mediatorial Kingdom** — God’s rule over the earth through a mediator — Man.
- **Theocratic Kingdom** — God’s rule over Israel began with the creation of Israel and ended with the expulsion of Israel from the land into the Babylonian captivity.
- **Messianic Kingdom** — The restoration of the Theocratic Kingdom (Israel) by the rule of Christ the King over the Mediatorial Kingdom (earth) and merged into the Universal Kingdom.

Conclusions

The Kingdom of God is a central theme of the Bible. After the angelic fall and later Adam’s fall, God is working to restore everything (Gen 3:15). On a changed planet earth – but not yet the new earth – Israel and the nations as well as the glorified Church will serve our great God and King, the Lord Jesus Christ. During the Millennium every aspect of life on earth will experience a golden era. At the end of the Millennium, when the last rebellion has been eliminated and last enemy has been destroyed, Christ will hand over the Theocratic/Mediatorial Kingdom to the King of the Universal Kingdom, that is, to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24-28).

What did Israel expect regarding the promised Kingdom?

Their understanding and expectations concerning the Kingdom included the following:

1. Israel’s enemies would be defeated
2. Israel would be the center of the world and all nations would pay homage to that
3. Israel will be regathered from its diaspora and reside in the promised land forever
4. There would be a Temple in Jerusalem
5. Some feast days (not all) will be observed
6. The “sons of Zadok” will comprise the priest in service
7. There would be a literal throne in Jerusalem
8. That throne would be occupied by a descendent of David

9. The Kingdom would begin after the “Coming of Messiah” to take the throne and establish the Kingdom
10. The Spirit of God would give all an understanding of Himself and His righteousness
11. There would be no spiritual ignorance
12. The Kingdom was viewed by Israel as physical, literal, and earthly
13. It would be a time of righteousness, peace and prosperity in a restored world with pre-fall Garden-like conditions under the physical and direct rule of Messiah.

The Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven?

And as if we didn't have enough kingdoms to define, we also have the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Both terms appear in Scripture, and that has generated some considerable debate among Bible scholars, regarding the questions of are there really two kingdoms with different names, and if so, what are these “two” kingdoms?

I am siding with Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum on this matter. He takes the position that there is really only one kingdom under two names. The term “Kingdom of Heaven” appears only in Matthew's Gospel, while the “Kingdom of God” appears in the other gospels, and that is significant. Matthew is primarily a Jewish book and focuses on the Jewish roots of Messiah and sees His life from a Jewish perspective. You may have noticed that some people, especially observant Jews, even today never write the word “God” but rather render it as “G–d”? That is because of their desire to observe the commandment to not take the Lord's name in vein, thus they refuse to speak it or render it in writing. The name of God, “*Yahweh*” is rarely used in Scripture nor do we even know how to pronounce it since the vowel points are omitted in the Hebrew texts. Furthermore, the term “*Adonai*” (in the Hebrew) is usually substituted and translated “LORD in all caps). When you see “LORD” rendered in all caps, it is *adonai* and is referring to God, while “lord” in lower case is not referring to God. Interestingly, both *Yahweh* and *Adonai* are plural.

Fruchtenbaum, himself a Jew, proposes that Matthew, a Jew speaking to a primarily Jewish audience, used the term “Kingdom of Heaven” for this reason, while the other gospel writers did not feel so compelled because their audience was not primarily Jewish. If you compare passages in the gospels that use these two terms, you will see that they are speaking of the same event and context, but use the two different terms to describe the same thing.

Luke 10:1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ² And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘**The kingdom of God** has come near to you.’ ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the **kingdom of God has come near.**’ ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Compare that to a similar passage in Matthew that is speaking of the same event.

Mat 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The **kingdom of heaven is at hand.**’ ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. ⁹ Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, ¹⁰ no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. ¹¹ And whatever town or village you enter, find out

who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. ¹² As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³ And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

The word translated “God” in the Luke passage is *theos*, which is correctly translated as “God”. But Matthew uses a different word, *ouranos*, which is usually translated “heaven” and can refer to either the sky above (First Heaven), or outer space (Second Heaven) or the abode of God (Third Heaven), depending on the context. As we can see, in similar passages in Matthew and Luke, the two apostles are describing the same event when Jesus sending out His disciples and giving them instructions, and they use different words to express the same “Kingdom,” which of course is a restoration of the Theocratic Kingdom in the form of the Messianic Kingdom.

There is another issue that needs to be discussed, and that is statements made by both John the Baptist and Jesus that announced “the Kingdom is near” or “at hand” (Luke 21:31; Mat 3:2, 4:17, 10:7; Mk 1:15; Luke 10:9, 11).

In the Luke passage we just looked at, the term “near” is *eggize* and means to come near or draw near or even join one thing to another. Here, I believe, it means the Kingdom is close but not quite “joined,” as in not quite there yet. In the Matthew passage, the term translated “at hand” is exactly the same Greek word. Both Jesus and John are saying the Kingdom is very close, near, or at hand. Yet, it has been 2,000 years since they said that, and there is still no Temple in Jerusalem, no Throne of David, no King on that throne, and no Kingdom?

Once more we have disagreement as to the meaning of the term. What did John the Baptizer and Jesus mean when they referred to the Kingdom being near or at hand, and yet we see no Kingdom 2,000 years later?

Since neither man made any effort to define what they meant by the use of the term “kingdom” (*basileia*) that would strongly suggest that they expected their audience to understand what they were referring to. If it were something different from what the Jews already understood, then John and Jesus would have had to explain that difference, and there is no such attempt to do so in Scripture. From that we must conclude that they were speaking of the Kingdom that the Jews were expecting and not some other undefined form of kingdom, which they would have had to explain to their audience. But we have no Kingdom 2,000 years later!

Fruchtenbaum and others take the position that the Kingdom the Jews were expecting was indeed being offered to them, but they had a choice to receive it or not, at that time. In order for them to receive the Kingdom as promised, they had to receive the King, meaning Jesus as their Messiah, which the leadership and most of the population of Israel did not do. Reject the King, and you reject the Kingdom. They rejected the King and thus the Kingdom, and God withdrew the offer to Israel. While the offer was withdrawn at that time, Israel will ultimately receive its Kingdom just as God promised.

Meanwhile, we have the Church Age when God turned from dealing with Israel and is calling out a body of believers of His own from among the Gentiles. One very significant feature of the Church Age is the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all believers, which was not a feature in previous ages but is to be a feature in the future Kingdom. So what Gives?

While there is some debate on this among biblical scholars, I believe part of God’s turning from Israel to the Gentiles is as Paul says in Romans 11:11 “salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous”. God is allowing the Gentile believers who came to Christ during the Church Age to experience the “spiritual aspects” of the Kingdom promised to Israel, that being the indwelling Holy Spirit and His ministries of guiding/leading, enablement to have victory over sin enjoyed by the “walking” believer (Gal 5:16), and teaching. That is a level of spiritual life that was impossible to achieve for the Jews under the Law because they did not have this universal indwelling of the Spirit. Only some few Old Testament saints had that, namely people like Adam, Noah, Moses, some kings like David, prophets, and the artisans that made the articles of worship used in the

Tabernacle/Temple. Furthermore, their possession of that empowerment was temporary and could be taken away for any number of reasons. David alluded to this when he repented of his sins with Bathsheba and prayed “take not thy Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51:11). Let me give you a couple more passages that demonstrate this temporary “endowment” of power during this period.

1 Sam 16:11 Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” 12 And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.” 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the **Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David** from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

Note that the Spirit came upon David from that day forward. And we have something interesting in the very next verse.

1 Sam 16:14 Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him.

Immediately you are going to get hung up on the statement “a harmful spirit from the Lord”. During this period or dispensation, the Holy Spirit did not indwell all believers, In fact His power worked in those whom God selected for service (cf. Jud. 3:10; 6:34; 13:25; 14:6; 1 Sam. 10:10; 16:13). Furthermore, the Lord allowed evil spirits to torment believers—for example Job and, in this example above, Saul who had found disfavor with the Lord. Here are a few more examples of the Spirit of the Lord coming upon someone.

2 Chron 15:1 The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded...

Numbers 24:2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him,

1 Sam 10:10 (*Referring to Saul*) When they came to Gibeah, behold, a group of prophets met him, and the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied among them

Exodus 31:1 The Lord said to Moses, ²“See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and **I have filled him with the Spirit of God**, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, ⁴ to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. ⁶ And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: ⁷ the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, ⁸ the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, ⁹ and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, ¹⁰ and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, ¹¹ and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do.”

The point is there was no universal indwelling in the Old Testament. That is a feature of the Church Age and the Kingdom.

And now, we will shift to a look into the details of the Messianic Kingdom / Millennium ...