

# The Kingdom of God

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**“The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom rules over all.”**  
*Psalm 103:19*

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**T**here is a dimension of reality that the Bible calls the kingdom of God. In the new birth (John 3:3; Colossians 1:13), God transfers the sinner’s allegiance from the kingdom of darkness (sin, selfishness, and destruction) to the kingdom of light (righteousness, self-giving love, and life). In regeneration, God grants, by His free and unmerited grace, His Spirit and makes the sinner a new creation, His dwelling place, the outshining radiance of His glory, a member of His body (I Corinthians 3:16; 12:13; II Corinthians 4:6; 5:17). Like a prism, God purposes to reflect through His body the rainbow of His attributes (Ephesians 3:10). To display the colors of the spectrum, a prism must be in right relationship to the source of light. To display the manifold glories of God's attributes, the prism must be in right relationship to God's light. Each member of the body must learn to order every aspect of life in terms of the saving and authoritative word of Christ.

The prophet Zechariah spoke of the coming Age of Messiah, the kingdom of God. He pictured it as a domain in which the all of life would be lived in and for the glory of God. He affirmed the truth that you cannot separate the sacred from the secular. The most trifling details, even the bells of horses and cooking pots in the kitchen, will serve God.

*“In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, HOLY TO THE LORD. And the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the bowls before the altar. And every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 14:20-21).*

The New Testament unveils the Age of Messiah in all its wondrous glory and impact. Adeptly described by the Apostle Paul, he proclaimed in reality what Zechariah and the rest of the prophets pictured in shadow.

*“Whether, then, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (I Corinthians 10:31).*

*“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17).*

The two phrases, the glory of God and the name of the Lord Jesus, are identical in meaning. In the Old Testament, glory literally meant “to be heavy.” This does not mean that God, who is Spirit, suffers from a weight problem. Remember the beatniks of the 1950s? Whenever someone said something really significant they would reply, “Man, that's heavy.” God, by the very greatness of His being, is “heavy” with significance. His glory is the unfolding of His awe-inspiring attributes (Exodus 33:18-34:7).

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To a Hebrew, the name of a person means more than the mere identification of that person's face. The name of a person revealed the character of that person. The Name of God is the revelation of the character of God. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In the character of Jesus we see the character of His Father. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. In Jesus, all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form (Colossians 2:9).

According to Colossians 1:16-20, the redemption of Christ affects all things so that He might be preeminent in all things.

Given this perspective, we must do everything as an expression of God's perfect and good character (I Peter 1:15). Everything we do - how we dress, what we watch, what we eat, how we raise our family, how we vote, how we treat our neighbors, how we deal with money - should reflect the good purposes of God. The reality of the kingdom of God in the life of His body will have external manifestations. The power of the Holy Spirit within will produce fruit without. The object of Christ's kingdom, as articulated in Isaac Watt's famous Christmas hymn, is to "make His blessings flow far as the curse is found."

*"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened" (Matthew 13:33).*

The scope of the kingdom of God is that it embraces every aspect of life. In the parables of Jesus, He illustrated three fundamental truths about the kingdom of God..

1. *The planting of the seed.*
2. *The growth of the seed.*
3. *The harvest of the seed.*

What is the seed? In the parable of the sower, Jesus defined the seed as the "word of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:19). In the parable of the wheat and tares, He defined the good seed as the "sons of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:38).

Where is the seed planted? In the parable of the sower, the sower planted the seed in the soil of human hearts. Only the good soil of hearing and understanding brought forth fruit (Matthew 13:23). In Luke 8:15, Christ defines the good ground as "the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance." In the parable of the wheat and tares, the sower planted the good seed in the field of the world (Matthew 13:38).

Note the connection between these two parables. God transforms the good heart with the word of God. He then takes these hearts and, as good seed, plants them into the world to transform it. Individual Christians transformed by God's word become a living embodiment of that word and by that transform the world around them. Jesus illustrated that truth in His next two parables, the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven. We will study these in a moment.

When was the seed planted? John the Baptist said, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). He meant that the Messianic kingdom, the hope of the prophets of old, was about ready to be inaugurated. When Jesus came, he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom and declared the kingdom

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to be in the midst of those listening to Him (Luke 17:21). After His resurrection from the dead, Peter told the Jews at Jerusalem that Jesus had been “exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:33). The apostles and evangelists then went everywhere preaching the good news that the kingdom of God had come. What was the proof? Lives transformed by the word of the kingdom. The seed of the kingdom has been planted in human history in the incarnation of Christ.

When is the harvest of the seed? Jesus said that the harvest is the end of the age (Matthew 13:39). History is moving toward this day of harvest. It will be the day when Christ “delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power” (I Corinthians 15:24). It will be the day death is finally defeated (John 6:39-44; I Corinthians 15:25-26). It will be the day when the wicked (tares) are cast into the furnace of fire (Matthew 13:41-42, 49-50). It will be the day when “the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). It will be the day of victorious coronation. The sons of the kingdom are the goal of history. We count for something! History is not just a collection of dates and notable figures. Contrary to Edward Gibbon, history is not a “register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind.” All the affairs of men and nations have the maturing of the good seed as their end (Ephesians 5:25-27).

This knowledge of the coming day of harvest has practical results for day to day living. Instead of living in despair of the future, we can be bold as we face the future. Why? We have the seed of the kingdom in us. The harvest is assured because the seed has been planted. The Apostle Paul, after discussing this day of harvest, gave practical application:

*“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (I Corinthians 15:58).*

Unbelievers (tares) have no power or authority. All their attempts to establish power is just a facade. We render their charade ineffective by proclaiming and demonstrating the word of the kingdom in every area of life.

What about the growth of the seed? The growth of the seed is the history of the seed and we are part of it. Jesus emphasized that the seed grows to maturity. The wheat grows to maturity so that you can distinguish it from the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). At maturity, the wheat is loaded with fruit causing its head to bow. The tare lacks fruit; its head stands straight. Jesus described this growth in the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven (Matthew 13:31-33).

The mustard seed is imperceptibly small with a diameter equal to the thickness of two dimes. It grows into a “tree” nine to ten feet in height. In New Testament times, something minuscule was “as small as a mustard seed.” The beginning is wholly inadequate to explain the result. Birds build their nests in the mustard tree, rest under its shadow, and eat the mustard seed. The bird imagery speaks of nations (Ezekiel 17:23; 31:6-12; Daniel 4:12-22). The mustard tree speaks of security, protection, and provision. As the mustard seed of the kingdom grows in human history, the nations will look more frequently to the sons of the kingdom for security, protection, and provision.

Leaven is yeast. Through fermentation, yeast breaks up sugar to form alcohol and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) gas. Fermentation turns grain extracts into beer; fruit juice into wine. In bread dough, the CO<sub>2</sub>

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causes the dough to rise and produces a soft, fluffy, full loaf. This growth is slow and gradual; almost imperceptible. Through its inherent and mysterious energy, it permeates the *whole* loaf. Every particle of the dough will be changed. This fact is *a certainty*; once the leaven is in the dough, you cannot get it out!

The leaven represents the kingdom's gradual influence and impact on all things. Leaven is the power of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of the sons of the kingdom to permeate the whole world with the word of the kingdom.

In volume I of Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, he begins, "The history of the church is the rise and progress of the kingdom of heaven upon earth, for the glory of God and the salvation of the world .... It is a continuous commentary on the Lord's twin parables of the mustard seed and of the leaven. It shows at once how Christianity spreads over the world, and how it penetrates, transforms, and sanctifies the individual and all departments and institutions of social life .... From Jesus Christ, since His manifestation in the flesh, an unbroken stream of divine light and life has been and is still flowing, and will continue to flow, in ever growing volume, through the waste of our fallen race." At the beginning of Neander's *History of the Christian Religion and Church* (Vol. I, p. 1), he says, "Our purpose is to trace, through the course of past centuries, lying before us for review, the growth of that mighty tree which, springing up from the little grain of mustard seed, is destined to overshadow the earth, and under the branches of which all nations are to find a safe lodging. The history will show us how a little leaven, cast into the lump of humanity, has been gradually leavening it."

It is important to note that the Bible gives us an optimistic view of the future. In time and on earth, there will be *progress* before Christ comes again. This progress will not be without pain, however. As the kingdom grows, there will be battles, trials, sufferings, persecutions, tribulations (Revelation 1:9; II Timothy 1:8; 2:12). Satan, doomed by the Cross, will not give up without a fight!

Isaiah 65:17-25 (cf. Isaiah 11:1-9) gives us details about the impact of the kingdom on the earth *before* Christ comes again. For example, a youth is thought accursed if he dies at age *one hundred*. The days of God's people will be as a lifetime of a *tree*. This cannot be a picture of heaven, since *the curse of death* still exists and death shall be destroyed when Christ comes again. This passage speaks about the new heaven and new earth, the new Jerusalem, the new creation to which believers *have already come* (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:1-2). This is a picture of the mature kingdom of God, the stalks of wheat bowed heavy with fruit, ready for harvest.

The Bible also speaks of *continuity*. The sons of the kingdom (wheat) and the evil ones (tares) will continue on earth until the harvest at the end of the age. First, Christ will send forth His angels to gather the stumbling blocks and lawless ones together in bundles to be burned in judgment. Then, the angels will gather the wheat into the barn of the consummated kingdom of Christ and His Father.

In summary, the Bible tells us that in time and on earth *before* Christ comes again, we can expect continuity *and* progress for the kingdom of God.

According to John 15, the key to growth is obedience to God's word. If you are a disciple of Christ, be obedient and God will use you to transform others into the good seed of the kingdom. If you are not Christ's disciple, turn from your lawlessness and join the team that will win for time and eternity!