

## WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

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**T**he kingdom of God (also called “the kingdom of heaven,” “the kingdom of Christ,” “the kingdom of the Lord,” “the kingdom,” etc.) undergirds the teaching of the entire Bible. The Scriptures reveal God using a number of metaphors, but the primary imagery which biblical writers used for God was that of a divine King (e.g. 1 Sam. 8:7). Alongside the basic conviction that God is the supreme King is the belief that he reigns over creation as his kingdom (Pss. 47:1-9; 83:18; Dan. 4:25-26; 5:21). In this general sense then, God has always been the sovereign reigning King who rules in heaven over all things (Pss. 103:19; 113:5; Matt. 5:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 1:16; Heb. 12:2; Rev. 7:15).

The biblical concept of the kingdom of God also occasionally takes on a special sense. Jesus described this narrower sense of the kingdom of in this way: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). God’s holiness and glory in his heavenly throne room is so overwhelming that all creatures there honor him with unqualified voluntary service. On earth, however, creatures rebel and refuse to acknowledge God as King, and evil kingdoms rise up to oppose God’s Kingdom. The hope that Scripture presents from cover to cover is that this disparity between the heavenly throne room and earth will be eliminated one day (1 Chr. 16:31). God will judge the wicked and bring redeemed humanity into a new creation (Isa. 65; Zech. 14). When this transformation takes place, only God’s kingdom will stand and voluntary obedience to him will extend to the ends of the earth as it does in heaven (1 Chr. 16:31; Ps. 97:1-2).

The Scriptures reveal, however, that God determined to accomplish this end through a lengthy historical process. With the choice of Abraham and his descendants as God’s special people (Exod. 3:6-7; 6:2-8), the kingdom of God was primarily limited to the people and land of Israel. God asserted his kingship on earth when he delivered Israel from the Egyptian empire and brought her to the Promised Land (Exod. 15). Under David and Solomon, Israel itself became a defined territory with the sons of David sitting on the throne of God as his vice-regents (1 Chr. 29:23; 2 Chr. 6), and with God’s royal footstool in the temple (1 Chr. 28:2). This ethnically and geographically limited form of the Kingdom was not an end in itself. On the contrary, Old Testament Israel was established as a stage from which the kingdom of God would eventually extend to all peoples and lands of the earth (Gen. 17:17-18; 18:18; Rom. 4:13-17).

The flagrant rebellion of Israel and Judah eventually hurled the kingdom of God in Israel into crisis. Yet, the Old Testament announced that after the exile God would remove the wicked from the earth, and establish his reign without opposition over the entire earth (Mal. 4). At that time, full obedience to God would spread to the

ends of the earth, reaching both Jews and Gentiles (1 Chr. 16:23-36; Isa. 52:7-15; Pss. 67, 97).

The New Testament teaches that this final worldwide stage of the kingdom of God began with the incarnation of Christ. He and John the Baptist announced the good news that the Kingdom was at hand (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15). But contrary to common Jewish expectations, Jesus and his apostles explained that the worldwide reign of God on earth would not come immediately in all of its fullness. Instead, Christ inaugurated this final stage of the kingdom in his earthly ministry (Matt. 2:2; 4:23; 9:35; 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 16:16; 23:3; John 18:37). It continues today in the church (Matt. 24:14; Rom. 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 4:19-20; Col. 4:11), but it will reach its ultimate end when Christ returns in glory (1 Cor. 15:50-58; Rev. 11:5). When that day finally comes, the will of God will be done throughout the earth just as it is done in heaven.

A study of the biblical references and the subsequent illustration can help our understanding of this major doctrine.

1. **Broad meaning:** Pss. 103:19; 113:5; Matt. 5:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 1:16; Heb. 12:2; Rev. 7:15
2. **Narrow meaning:** 1 Chr. 16:31; Ps. 97:1-2; Matt. 6:10.
3. **Inauguration:** Matt. 2:2; 4:23; 9:35; 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 16:16; 23:3; John 18:37
4. **Continuation:** Matt. 24:14; Rom. 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 4:19-20; Col. 4:11
5. **Consummation:** 1 Cor. 15:50-58; Rev. 11:5

