

THE KINGDOM IS AT HAND

In Matthew 10:5-6, Jesus instructed His apostles not to go to the Gentiles with a designated “kingdom sign” ministry; but rather ONLY to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The kingdom was only being offered to Israel because “kingdom truth” runs through Israel. The Messianic kingdom comes to the world through Israel. If Israel had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, the kingdom would have come. But alas, as foreknown by God, Israel rejected her Messiah, resulting in the kingdom being delayed and Christ going to the cross instead.

Matthew 10:7 (NKJV)

7 And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

Note the connection between the authority given the apostles to do kingdom miracles and their message that “***The kingdom of heaven is at hand.***”

Matthew 10:1 (NKJV)

1 And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.

Matthew 10:7 (NKJV)

7 And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

Their miracles matched their message, and it was a KINGDOM MESSAGE! In the OT in various Messianic kingdom passages such as in Isaiah 35 it shows that when the kingdom comes, great miracles of healing will accompany it. That is why, when John the Baptist was in prison and had questions about whether Jesus was the promised Messiah, Jesus sent this answer back to him.

Matthew 11:4–5 (NKJV)

4 Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

5 The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

Let’s pause for just a moment and reiterate what the Bible has to teach about the kingdom. The Bible is a book about the coming kingdom. The kingdom is a MAJOR/CENTRAL theme.

“The Bible is one book. Had we to give that book a title, we might with justice call it ‘*The Book of the Coming Kingdom of God*’. This is, indeed, its central theme everywhere.” – **Richard Mayhue**

The whole of redemptive history is headed towards the coming kingdom. In the end, every person will either share in God’s kingdom or will be cast out of it. So, it is given great importance in the whole of Scripture. But there has been and continues to be MUCH errant kingdom teaching involving the mission, activity, and perspective of the Church. There is so much confusion about the kingdom which relates to all kinds of errors such as supposed healing ministries, dominion theology, the social gospel, and a purely spiritualized form of the kingdom.

Augustine once said, “***Distinguish the ages, and the Scriptures will harmonize.***” It is too bad he didn’t hold to a consistent literal interpretation of Scripture, and because of it ended up totally spiritualizing the kingdom.

The early Church for the first 200 years held to a literal premillennial return of Christ and that He would come again to literally reign on the earth. However, Origen (185-254 AD) began to “spiritualize” the idea of the kingdom and understood it to be realized in the present Church Age.

However, building on that, it was Augustine (354-430 AD) who systematized an allegorical approach to understanding the kingdom. So, Origen laid the foundation, and Augustine systematized a “***spiritual view***” of the kingdom.

Augustine, in his famous book “***The City of God***,” put forth the idea that the Church was the kingdom of God on earth, which in effect politicized the Church, eventuating in the political nature and structure of the Roman Catholic Church. When Constantine gave Christianity favored status in the Roman Empire, it gave impetus to the idea that the Church is now the kingdom on earth and that God is now building His kingdom through the Church. This view that the Church is the kingdom then became the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

The key Reformers, Calvin and Luther, broke with Roman Catholicism in areas of soteriology (salvation), but they did not essentially break with Roman Catholicism in the area of eschatology (future things).

And so, Augustine’s “spiritualized” view of the kingdom has influenced the Church (in the broadest definition of the word) for about 1,600 years. Even to this day, the effects of an allegorical/spiritualized approach to prophecy and the kingdom (versus a literal approach) are still widely felt.

However, the Jews consistently anticipated a literal/physical coming kingdom in which the Messiah would personally reign. This is totally consistent with all the prophetic Scriptures.

The idea of a “***spiritual kingdom***” that merely exists in the hearts of God’s people is foreign to Scripture. God has always (in a sense – to some degree) reigned in the hearts of His people. In contrast, the Bible teaches the coming of a literal Messianic kingdom.

Revelation 11:15 (ESV)

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “**The kingdom of the world** has become the **kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ**, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

The Church is not the kingdom, and we are not in the kingdom. At His Second Coming, Christ comes as King of kings to inaugurate the kingdom. However, Christ is nowhere called “***the King of the Church***”. Rather, the imagery of His relationship to the Church is that of groom and bride or as HEAD to the body. Paul’s NT writings consistently place the kingdom in the future (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 15:24, 50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18).

The Scripture presents two kingdom aspects related to the world; one ever present, and one yet to come; one universal, and one Messianic. God is always SOVEREIGN. So, in the sense of sovereignty, God is always on His throne, and He ever rules over all the affairs and every detail of life. Three times in Daniel 4 it says, “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men” (cf. Dan. 4:17, 25, 32).

Psalms 145:13 (NKJV)

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Under the umbrella of God’s sovereignty, the whole of history has been marching towards a specific future Messianic Kingdom. The major kingdom markers in the Bible are in reference to this coming Messianic Kingdom.

Simply put, the Messianic kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament, in which the Messiah will literally come and rule on the earth, is the same kingdom offered by Christ to Israel in the gospels and then referred to in the New Testament epistles. The same Messianic kingdom prophesied in the OT sees fulfillment in the book of Revelation at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (see Rev. 11:15). The whole course of history is continually

moving towards this Messianic kingdom in which the Messiah will rule the world. It's coming! HE IS COMING! The KINGDOM is coming!

If you keep these truths straight in your mind, it will serve you well in rightly dividing the Word in relation to the subject of the kingdom. And a normal/literal interpretation of Scripture consistently applied will lead you to this position.

Rightly Dividing the Word...

1. The Church is NOT the kingdom, but believers live in anticipation of it.
2. The Messiah Personally Ushers in the kingdom at His Second Coming.
3. The Kingdom is yet Future.

The PLACE of the Messianic KINGDOM is prominent in Scripture, but its placement is yet FUTURE.

Chronological Outlay...

1. Present Church Age (Rev. 2-3).
2. Christ in Judgment Subdues the World (Rev. 11:15).
3. Christ comes as KING of kings to establish His KINGDOM (Rev. 19).

The coming Messianic kingdom has two phases. The first phase is a 1000-year reign commonly called the millennial reign. This is followed by the eternal state of the kingdom. Thus, this coming Messianic kingdom is an eternal kingdom that has two phases (cf. Dan. 2:44).

Note that Matthew mostly uses the terminology of “***The kingdom of heaven***” (32 times) whereas the other gospels use the terminology “***The kingdom of God***”. Matthew, writing to Jews, seems to be sensitive to the Jews not wanting to use the name God, and so he said “***kingdom of heaven***” instead of “***kingdom of God***”. But in truth, a close examination shows they are used interchangeably. In parallel gospel accounts, we see these phrases are used interchangeably.

Mark and Luke used “kingdom of God” where Matthew used “kingdom of heaven” frequently in parallel accounts of the same parable.

(Compare Matthew 11:11-12 with Luke 7:28; Matthew 13:11 with Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10; Matthew 13:24 with Mark 4:26; Matthew 13:31 with Mark 4:30 and Luke 13:18; Matthew 13:33 with Luke 13:20; Matthew 18:3 with Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16; and Matthew 22:2 with Luke 13:29).

In each instance, Matthew used the phrase “kingdom of heaven” while Mark and/or Luke used “kingdom of God.” Clearly, the two phrases refer to the same thing. (Gotquestions.org)

In Matthew itself, we have the occasion in Matthew 19 where Jesus Himself used these two designations interchangeably in an immediate context.

Matthew 19:23–24 (NKJV)

23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

The kingdom of heaven simply means the rule of heaven (or of God) on earth in the form of the Messianic rule.

Note that while Jesus also had a “**teaching**” ministry in relation to the kingdom (cf. Mt. 4:23; 9:35); the apostles at this point simply had a “**preaching**” (or heralding) ministry. To preach (kerusso) simply means “to make known, to announce, or to proclaim”. The apostles were still not mature enough to teach, but they could herald the kingdom as being “at hand,” with the evidence being the kingdom miracles which they performed.

The idea of the kingdom being “**at hand**” is the idea that it was “**near**”. In view of 3:2 and 4:17, where both John the Baptist and then Christ said, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,**” it is obvious that the kingdom was being presented to Israel on the condition of repentance. Thus “**at hand**” indicates its imminence but not its arrival.

And note that as the leaders of the land hardened in their rebellion against Christ, culminating in the blasphemy of the Spirit – from that point on the kingdom was no longer presented as being at hand or near. Rather, the parables of Matthew 13 go on to illustrate that because of this rejection there would now be a delay in God’s Messianic kingdom program.

We are still preaching the kingdom is coming, but we are not preaching it as being at hand.

“Two extremes must be avoided. First, it is wrong to deny any connection between the kingdom and the present age. The kingdom program is related to the present age in regard to the message of the kingdom and the growth of kingdom citizens. Second, it is incorrect to hold that the kingdom reign itself has been established in this age. That will occur at Jesus’ second coming.” – **Dr. Michal Vlach** in **HE WILL REIGN FOREVER**, p. 332