

What is the Kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is often mentioned in the New Testament. Many Christians believe they are going to heaven when they die, but don't speak much of the kingdom of God. We are told by Jesus, "seek you first the kingdom of God", and Paul says "don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (Matt. 6:33, 1 Cor. 6:9) The kingdom of God is something we should understand and be striving to obtain.

There have been many kingdoms that have risen and fallen over the millennia. Nimrod's Kingdom, the first mentioned, was a great kingdom. (Genesis 10) But the desires of the people were not good, so God confused their language and scattered them over the face of the earth. (Gen.11:1-9)

When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt He desired that they be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" to Him. They failed so God set Aaron and his descendants as priests over the people. He established judges also, but God was their King. After generations of struggle they rejected God as their king and wanted a human king like the nations around them. (1 Sam. 8:7) God said to Samuel, "they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."

Even when they had a human king to rule over them, God still gave them instructions regarding this kingdom. They were instructed, "Set a king over you that the LORD your God chooses, one from amongst your brethren and not a foreigner." The king was to "write for himself a copy of this (God's) law in a book and read it all the days of his life and be careful to observe all the words of the law and the statutes." (Deut. 17:14-20) With God as their king, He gave them the land of Israel to live in, His laws to live by, judges to help them with difficult decisions, and a priesthood to teach them and carry out certain responsibilities. He was their provider and protector. Had they been obedient to God this would have been an incredible kingdom.

However, most of the kings that ruled them were evil and led them away from God. Because of their evil ways, the nation was sent into captivity by God. This ended this kingdom with all of its potential.

Is there a future for this kingdom of Israel, and what about the rest of the world? God made a covenant with King David saying, "your house and your kingdom will be established forever before you. Your throne will be established forever." (2 Sam. 7:16) Isaiah prophesies of a promised son in whom "the increase of His government and peace will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever, the zeal of the LORD of host will perform this." (Isa. 9:6-7) Daniel also prophesies of a future kingdom that "the God of heaven will set up which will never be destroyed." (Dan. 2:44) He speaks of "one like the son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient of Days and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His kingdom shall not be destroyed...and the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever and all dominions shall serve and obey him." (Dan.7:13-14, 18, 27)

These scriptures speak of an everlasting kingdom to come, a prophesied ruler who will reign on the throne of David over all the earth and the saints ruling with him. When will this occur?

The angel spoke to Mary saying, "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:31-22)

When Jesus, the son of God came, he spoke often of the kingdom of God. The phrase kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven are interchangeable. As an example, Mark said, "Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God." (Mark 10:14) Matthew's same account says, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19:14) So anywhere it is written "kingdom of heaven," it is referring to the kingdom of God.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "thy kingdom come." (Matt. 6:10) The disciples knew the scriptures and the prophecies of the everlasting kingdom to come. In order to enter the kingdom of God He said you must repent (Matt.3:2, 4:17), believe the gospel (Mark 1:15), do the will of his Father (Matt. 7:21), bring forth fruits (Matt. 21:43), be born again of water and of the spirit (John 3:3-5), and overcome. (Rev.3:12, 21)

Jesus preached about the kingdom of God (Mk. 1:14, Luke 8:1, Matt. 4:23, Acts 1:3), as did Philip (Acts 8:13) and Paul (Acts 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 31). He taught his followers to "strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." (Luke 13:24) He proclaimed many would not enter because He did not know them because they practiced lawlessness. (Luke 13:25-27, Matt. 7:21-23)

Jesus looked forward to the kingdom, saying at his last meal with his disciples, "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." (Luke 22:18) He stated Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets would be in the kingdom of God. (Luke 13:28) He told his disciples, "I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:30) Matthew records it this way, "Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" The twelve apostles will be kings over Israel in the kingdom of God, and Jesus will be ruler over all. When Pilate asked Jesus if he was a king, Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world." (John 18:37) When He was about to leave this earth to ascend to the Father, His disciples asked Him, "Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

In Revelation 19 Jesus is prophesied as coming to earth as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" fighting against the kings of the earth and defeating them. (Rev. 19:11-21) Those "who were beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God" will rule on this earth with Christ for 1000 years. This occurs after the first resurrection, in which the "dead in Christ" and the faithful who are alive will meet Jesus at his return. (1 Thess. 4:15-17, Rev. 20:4-6) John's description parallels Daniel's prophesy of the son of man coming and ruling with the saints.

Revelation 21 speaks of a "new heaven and new earth," and the holy city, New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. That city had "a great high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the

gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.” (Rev. 21:12) “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (v. 14) In this city, “God Himself will be with them and be their God.” (Rev.21:3)

Abraham knew about this city. “He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. 11:10) Neither Abraham, nor any of the other faithful, have received the promised kingdom of God or beautiful New Jerusalem yet. (Heb.11:39-40) Paul spoke of this promise saying, “Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain...why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?” (Acts 26:6-8) Paul “explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” (Acts 28:23) Jesus and the apostles taught of the resurrection of the dead and the prophesied King to come in the Kingdom of God, the hope of many.

Jesus’ promise to the churches was, “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem, which will come down out of heaven from my God.” (Rev. 3:12) “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Rev. 3:21)

What about so many from the time of Adam till the time when Jesus returns who have not been faithful? Revelation speaks of another resurrection after the 1000 year reign of Jesus and the saints but before the new heaven and earth and New Jerusalem. It says the “dead small and great stand before God” and the book of Life is opened. The dead are judged according to their works. There is not much said about this time or judgment. (Rev. 20:11-13) Ezekiel prophesies to Israel, “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, O my people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land.” (Ezek. 37:12-14) It seems there is a hope for disobedient Israel and for all others in this resurrection.

There is a great future especially for the faithful in the first resurrection and also for all mankind. It is the coming kingdom of God on this earth. It begins with Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and as we see in Rev. 21, it culminates with God himself dwelling with us. Paul said, “then comes the end, when He (Christ) delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. Then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.” (1 Cor. 15:24,28) Many kingdoms have risen and fallen over the millennia, but the kingdom of God will come! It will be a kingdom ruled by God, inhabited by the righteous. It will be a wonderful kingdom of peace and prosperity. Let us seek first the kingdom of God!