

## QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

### 54 What Is the Kingdom of God?

*Scripture: John 18:33-36; Romans 14:17; Revelation 11:15*

Our study has been concerned with certain events to take place upon the return of Christ. One event will be the establishment of a kingdom. History is moving toward the time when Christ will reign as king. Handel captured for millions this truth in his incomparable Messiah when he quoted from Revelation 11:15, *"And the seventh angel sounded and there were great voices in Heaven saying, 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'"* This, of course, is the whole point of Biblical eschatology and the Christian view of things to come. We have in this conviction the basis of Christian optimism and the point from which we are able to rightly understand history. Jesus Christ is coming again and when He does, He will reign forever and ever as the sovereign Lord and king.

The word *"kingdom"* is used many times in the Bible. It is surely one of the important words in Scriptural vocabulary. It occurs 147 times in the Old Testament and appears under various translations as *"reign," "realm," "royal,"* though having as its origin the Hebrew word *"malkuth."* The word Kingdom(s) appears 162 times in the New Testament and originates from the Greek *"basileia."* It is important for us to keep in mind that both testaments and words have a common source. The words were chosen by God from the vocabularies of men in order to convey truth in an understandable way. The word *"kingdom"* therefore, will mean the same at all points in Scripture in spite of the fact that certain facets of the kingdom may vary. It is important for us to discern the various connotations of the kingdom as we look forward to the coming of Christ and His ultimate rule. It seems to me that the kingdom of God is represented in Scripture under seven different categories and this morning we will try to distinguish them.

#### **I. THE UNIVERSAL KINGDOM OF GOD:**

This first manifestation of the kingdom of God arises out of the fact that God first created the universe in which we live and that He further preserves what He has created. In Gerhard Kittel's massive study of New Testament vocabulary a scholar points out that the word *"kingdom"* originally meant only the being

or essence of a king, and that a second meaning flows necessarily from the first: The office of the king is felt in the dominion and sovereignty he exercises. God is the owner-proprietor of His universe. Psalm 10:16 tells us, *"The Lord is King for ever and ever."*

This same truth is found in Psalm 24:1,2,9,10. *"To the Lord is the earth and its fullness, the world, and the dwellers in it, for He has founded it. And the King of glory shall enter. Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord of hosts: He is the King of glory."* Jeremiah 10:7 reads, *"Who does not fear thee, King of nations?"* It has been so from the beginning. The Garden of Eden was a theocracy. Everything was under the authority of the Lord.

In spite of the fact that man has voluntarily elected to throw off subjection to God, man is given power by God. Without the realization that his power is derived from God, man becomes proud and God no longer has a place in his thoughts. Be that as it may, every being derives its strength from God. There is a certain kingdom which claims authority over all forms of life and existence. Years ago I came across a statement by Dr Donald Barnhouse which I have been much encouraged by again and again. He wrote, "God runs all things. God runs hell. Everything is subject to God, including Satan. God runs Washington. God runs Moscow. God runs labor unions. The midgets who swarm around these stages think that they are pulling the ropes, but they are only filling out the pattern which the sovereign King has set, and when His moment comes He will quell their prancing and all the universe will acknowledge that He alone is God."

I have already made mention of the Hebrew word "malkuth." Again, the primary idea inherent in this word is not that of territorial influence as much as it is sovereignty. It is God who has created all things. It is God who maintains all things. It is God who alone has dominion and is in control. Nothing happens outside of His will. This is what is meant by the universal kingdom of God. God's power exceeds all others. We have an interesting example of this in Daniel 2:44 where a picture is given of the collapse of earthly nations.

Daniel 4:32 reads, *"The most high rules the kingdoms of men and gives it to whom He will."* The next kind of kingdom we will speak of has to do with the kingdoms of men, but it is God Who establishes them. *"There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."* (Romans 13:1) In His universal kingdom God exercises absolute sovereignty.

## II. THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD:

Included within the scope of God's universal and paternal governing of the universe is a delegated and lesser authority which we may refer to as the kingdoms of this world. The point is that God allows His creatures an amazing degree of liberty so that men wield much power and authority. There are many references in Scripture having to do with this delegated power. We may refer to Matthew 12:26 (Satan's kingdom), Matthew 4:8, 24:7; Hebrews 11:33, and Revelation 11:15, 17:12, 17.

The sovereignty of God is being exercised in this world through nations in spite of the fact that such nations either reject it or are ignorant of it. In Proverbs 21:1 we read, *"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord."* This same truth is indicated in Ezra 1:1 and Isaiah 44:24 - 45:7. Men do have power. They exercise it for a little while, surrender to those who follow, and go down to dust.

## III. THE KINGDOM OF SATAN:

One of the most incredible statements to be found in the Bible is one which came from the mouth of Satan, the father of lies. (John 8:44) In the course of tempting Christ he said, "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it." (Luke 4:6) The enemy of the Lord was aware, at this point, that God had granted him with the power and glory of the kingdoms of this world. (Ezekiel 28:14) Originally God had created all things and creatures perfect. Free will was granted to angels and sin originated when Lucifer, the highest of all creatures, challenged God's right to rule. (Ezekiel 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:12-17) The nations of the world have become Satan's domain. He is represented as being the god of this age (II Corinthians 4:4), and the prince of the power of the air. (Ephesians 2:2)

## IV. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE HUMAN HEART:

Having considered the rule of God over the universe He has created, it is necessary to say that while all men are included in that kingdom by natural birth, there is a spiritual kingdom which is entered only by a second and spiritual birth. Jesus told Nicodemus, *"Except a man be born of water and the spirit (hudor kai pneuma) he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* (John 3:5) The translators have translated and interpreted the second noun, pneuma, meaning breath or wind as Spirit. The first word, hudor, while meaning water, would have been better translated "word." (i.e. interpreted word) There is no ground here for the ritualists who speak of baptismal regeneration. "Water" here is used

emblematically as throughout the Gospel of John. (John 4:14; 7:37-38) Many emblems for the Word of God are used. It is a lamp to illumine (Psalm 119:105), it is a hammer to smash (Jeremiah 23:29), it is water to cleanse (Psalm 119:9; John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26). To be born of “*water*” is to be born as being cleansed by the Word of God.

In Luke 17:21 the Pharisees asked when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus answered that it comes “*not with observation,*” but is “*within you.*” There is a mini-kingdom of God which exists in the world today. It began at Pentecost (Acts 2:1,41,47), was announced by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7) and predicted by the Lord (Matthew 16:18, 21). It is spiritual in nature and owns Christ as king within the heart. It is the kingdom Paul spoke of in Romans 14:17, “*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*” In John 8:35-36 the Lord makes it clear that it is not by revolt or by earthly means He will establish His kingdom, but He does not deny that He will rule over believing hearts by His Spirit.

#### **V. THE MYSTERIOUS KINGDOM OF OUR PRESENT WORLD:**

The word “mystery” in Scripture has to do with something undiscoverable by human reason and which can be understood only by revelation and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The thirteenth chapter of Matthew records seven parables which reveal conditions in the world in respect to the development of the kingdom during the time of Christ’s absence, the period between His ascension and His coming again.

In this passage the Kingdom is like a man sowing seed (Matthew 13:24), like a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31), like leaven in dough (Matthew 13:33), like hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44), like a pearl of great value (Matthew 13:45), like a net full of fish (Matthew 13:47), like a householder of new and old treasures (Matthew 13:52).

The purely spiritual nature of the kingdom of God during this present epoch makes it possible for error to be easily concealed and to subsist with truth. The emphasis of these parables is that the seed of the Word will continue to be sown throughout the world until the King returns, and because Satan cannot prevent such sowing he will see to it that error is mixed with truth so as to prevent a full harvest. The kingdom will increase in a visible way but fall prey to an invisible inner corruption. The Lord will secure the treasure He died to purchase, and the unbelieving will be excluded from the kingdom.

## VI. THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM:

The word “millennium” is a Latin term which means a thousand years. It is applied to that era spoken of in Revelation 20:2-7. This passage reveals certain characteristics or facts having to do with a millennium. We read that Satan is bound and sealed in the bottomless pit during this period. *“And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast, him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”*

(Revelation 20:2-3)

**Secondly:** The Apostle John saw a group sitting upon thrones. Judgment was given to them. He saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for Christ, and also these who had not worshipped the beast nor his image or received his mark on their foreheads, or in their hands. These groups reigned with Christ a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4)

**Thirdly,** the first resurrection precedes the millennium.

**Fourthly:** The second death has no power over those who have a part in the first resurrection. (Revelation 20:6)

**Fifthly:** Those who partake of the second resurrection do not live until after the millennium. (Revelation 20:5)

**Sixthly:** Satan will be loosed after the thousand years for a season. He will cause the rebellion of Gog and Magog. (Revelation 19:17-21) This passage is understood by believers in different ways, but all hold to the fact that it is Jesus Christ who reigns.

## VII. THE ETERNAL KINGDOM IN HEAVEN:

At some point in the future the Kingdom of God will be established on a perfect and eternal scale. In I Corinthians 15:24-26, 28, we read, *“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. And all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”*

Thus the ringing down of the curtain on the history of the world's drama will take place. When it rises there will be an entirely new scene. Sin, pain, sickness and death will be no more.

**1. New Heaven, Earth and Jerusalem:**

Not new in the absolute sense as we have seen before, because the "*earth abideth forever.*" (Ecclesiastes 1:4; Psalm 104:5; 119:90) The idea is change and transition. Several passages bring the new earth and Jerusalem to our understanding. (Revelation 21:1-2; Isaiah 65:17, 66:22; II Peter 3:10-13) We may be confident that Christ will reign from the new Jerusalem described in Revelation 21.

**2. The Subjects of this Kingdom:**

The condition of the Kingdom's inhabitants is that of eternal life and glory (Matthew 25:46; II Corinthians 4:17), rest (Hebrews 4:9), knowledge (I Corinthians 13:8-10), holiness (Revelation 21:27), service (Revelation 22:3), worship (Revelation 19:1) and communion with God (Revelation 21:3). The state entered upon will be endless in duration (Revelation 3:12; 22:15). Degrees of honor and responsibility in service will be equal to faithfulness in this life. (Luke 19:17; 1 Corinthians 3:14-15)

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