

**The kingdom of God**

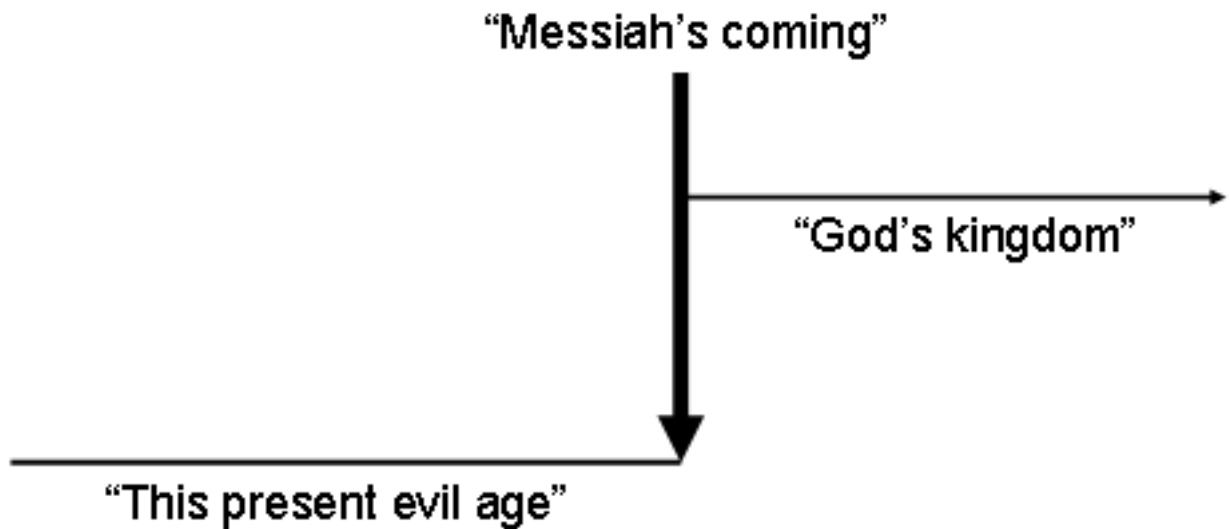
"And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the **gospel of the kingdom**, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people." - Matthew 4:23

A careful reader of the gospels can't help but notice how often Jesus talks about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was a central message in Jesus' ministry. Understanding what Jesus meant by "the kingdom of God" is essential in order to correctly interpret the gospels.

**The Old Testament expectation**

In order to appreciate what was new in Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God and how shocking it was to his Jewish audience, we need to know how *they* understood the kingdom idea in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament view of history was very straightforward. Since Adam chose to live independently from God, humanity lives in what Paul calls "this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4) - an age dominated by rebellion and evil. But God is sovereign over history, and one day he will replace this present evil age with his own kingdom, when the wicked will be judged and righteousness will reign. The event that separates these two periods of history is the coming of God's Messiah (read Dan. 7:13,14).



The arrival of this messianic king is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, the promise that God made to David that one day, one of his descendants would sit on his throne and rule the world forever. Recall from our Bible overview:

1000BC	<b>The Davidic Covenant</b> ⇒ <u>King &amp; kingdom blessing</u> (addresses problem #2 from the fall: LOST DOMINION)	<b>2 Sam. 7:12-16</b>
750-570BC	<b>The Prophets &amp; their two Portraits of the Messiah</b> ⇒ <u>Servant (Isaiah 53)</u> ⇒ <u>King (Isaiah 9, 11)</u>	Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Jeremiah
600BC	Exile of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) to Babylon ⇒ <u>Daniel's vision of the Kingdom of God</u>	Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9

In God's promise to David, we receive more information about who "the seed" will be. He will be a king, a descendant of David, and an heir of the promised eternal throne (II Samuel 7:11-16).

When the seed arrives, he will end the present evil age and set up God's eternal kingdom. He will crush all of his enemies and be exalted above all other authorities (Psalm 89, 110). Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel clearly point to a future "David" who will completely fulfill God's promises and bring about an eternal kingdom. This is an awesome promise considering the circumstances that the people of Israel faced as God moved in judgment against them during this time. Even though the people of God are exiled in a foreign land, God reiterates his promise through Daniel to create his own kingdom in which his people will dwell, led by a descendant of David.

**"The kingdom of god is at hand." (Mark 1:15)**

When Jesus opened his ministry with the announcement that the "kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15), you can appreciate why his audience expected a political revolution and the overthrow of the Roman occupiers. Even in Acts 1:6, the apostles seem to still be expecting this.

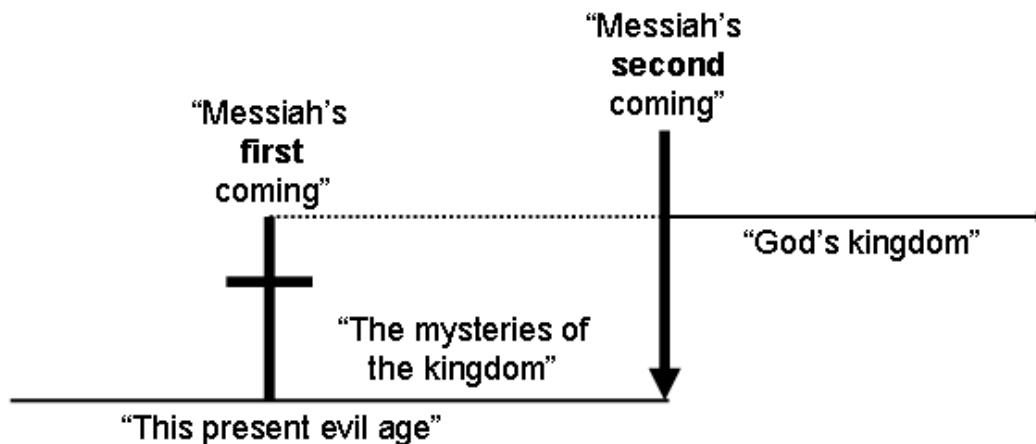
**The "mystery" phase of the Kingdom**

Unlike the kingdom the Jews expected, Jesus describes a portion of God's kingdom that he calls "the mysteries of the kingdom" (Mt. 13). Note that a biblical "mystery" is not something purposefully vague or difficult to understand (like a modern day mystery novel). It is simply a truth not revealed until now.

The mysteries of the kingdom of God refer to a portion of God's kingdom that was not clearly revealed in the Old Testament. Jesus was giving his listeners new information about God's kingdom that even the Old Testament prophets did not know.

In his teachings and parables, Jesus affirms the Old Testament picture of the kingdom of God described above, but he adds some crucial additional information about the coming of Messiah and the establishment of God's kingdom. What the Old Testament prophets called the coming of Messiah is actually his Second Coming. Prior to that time, Messiah would come - not as a reigning King but as suffering Servant - to die for the guilt of a rebellious humanity whom God loves. His first coming would usher in an unanticipated form of God's kingdom that is different in important ways from the kingdom in its fullness. This is what Jesus calls "the mysteries of the kingdom."

This unforeseen phase of the kingdom, which coincides with the time of history we live in, is described through seven parables in Matt. 13. See also John 18:36.



Recall from our Bible overview that the "Church Age," the mystery portion of the kingdom, is between the first and second coming of Christ.

4 BC-33AD	<b>Jesus Christ's Coming #1 (Servant)</b> ⇒ <b>Atonement blessing fulfilled (addresses problem #1 from the Fall: SEPARATION FROM GOD)</b>	Jn. 1:29, Mk. 10:45, Lk. 22:19,20
33 AD-?	<b>The Church Age (the mystery portion of God's kingdom)</b> ⇒ The <i>atonement blessing</i> expounded (Epistles) and expanded (Acts)	Mt. 24:4;28:18-20; Acts 1:8
?	<b>Jesus Christ's Coming #2 (King)</b> ⇒ <u>King &amp; kingdom blessing fulfilled: restored to co-rulership (addresses problem #2 from the Fall: LOST DOMINION)</u>	Rev. 4-22 <b>Rev. 5:9,10,</b> Rev. 7:9

### What did Jesus mean by "the Kingdom of God" in the Gospels?

The kingdom of God in the gospels is a dynamic idea, probably best defined as the *rule* of God. (For an excellent treatment of this topic, see George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 1st ed. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, p. 13-23.) In our western idiom, a kingdom is primarily a realm over which a king exercises his authority. The second modern meaning of kingdom is the people belonging to a given realm. Both of these ideas lead us astray from the Biblical definition. e.g. The medieval church equated the kingdom of God with the church itself, leading them to enforce belief at the point a sword.

The primary meaning of both the Hebrew and the Greek word for kingdom is the authority and sovereignty exercised by a king. A kingdom may be a realm over which a king exercises his authority; and it may be the people who belong to that realm and over whom that authority is exercised; but these are secondary meanings. First of all, a kingdom is the authority to rule, the sovereignty of the king.

An example of the word kingdom being used to describe the rule of a king is in Daniel 5:26. Notice that it was not the realm of Belshazzar or his people that were destroyed - his power was transferred to another ruler. It was his power and authority that were terminated.

### Kingdom as present and future

Proclamation of the kingdom is a crucial aspect of Jesus' teaching. The kingdom is portrayed as both a present reality and a future hope. It is a present reality, in that God offers his rule in the lives of those who would accept his messiah, but future in the sense that God will one day impose his rule without the consent of those under it. The future kingdom is the millennial kingdom established at the end of the age.

John the Baptist announced the presence of the kingdom in the ministry of Christ (Mt. 3:2; 4:7). Jesus makes it clear that the kingdom has come in his ministry (Mt. 12:28; 11:12,13). At the same time, Jesus looked to the kingdom as a future hope (Mk. 14:25; Mt. 8:11; Mt. 6:10). In his teaching, Jesus offered the kingdom of God to the Jews, but on the spiritual basis of individual repentance and faith, rather than on a politico-nationalistic basis, as they had expected of their messiah. By rejecting Jesus, most of the Jews, including their official leaders, rejected God's rule through the Messiah. Consequently, God has transferred his kingdom to the believing community, the church (Mt. 21:42, 43; Col. 1:13; Rom. 14:17; Ac. 28:23,28-31). Yet, there remains a plan for Israel in the end times.

### Parables of the Kingdom

#### What is a parable?

Definition: A parable is an analogy taken from common experience, in which there is usually one single point being made. It is not unlike a fable in that sense.

e.g. Parables of the lost sheep and lost coin (see Luke 15:1-10) illustrate how God welcomes sinners who repent.

There are various types of parables including stories (Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, the Rich Man and Lazarus) and similes (the treasure hidden in a field, the mustard seed).

When you interpret a parable, you should look for the main idea being conveyed. There are exceptions to the "one story, one point" principle. But unless there are clues within the text that more than one point is being made, most parables will make one point. Interpreters since Augustine have gotten into trouble ascribing meaning to each aspect of the parable. Each of the details are typically unimportant.

e.g. Augustine on the Good Samaritan:

- a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho = Adam
- Jericho = the moon, and thereby signifies Adam's mortality
- thieves = the devil and his angels
- stripped him = namely of his immortality
- beat him = by persuading him to sin
- and left him half dead = as a man he lives, but he died spiritually, therefore he is half-dead
- the priest and Levite = the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament
- the Samaritan = is said to mean guardian; therefore Christ himself is meant
- bound his wounds = means binding the restraint of sin
- oil = comfort of good hope
- wine = exhortation to work with a fervent spirit
- beast = the flesh of Christ's incarnation
- inn = the church
- the morrow = after the Resurrection
- two-pence = promise of this life and the life to come
- innkeeper = Paul

We can only ascribe meaning to the details of a parable when Jesus explains what those details mean (e.g. sower and the soils).

### **Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13**

Through these parables we learn about how God's kingdom is at work in the world today, and about how we can benefit from and cooperate with his activity. The key to understanding this parable is to ask: What does it reveal about God's kingdom that they did not already know? That's where we should start with the parables in Matthew 13...

The Seven Kingdom Parables of Matthew 13:

1: Parable of the Soils (13:1-23)

Main point: The kingdom grows through the spread of the gospel and depends on the response of those who hear the gospel.

2 & 3: Parable of Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30; 36-43)

Main point: During the present phase of God's kingdom, it is not His will for his people to be separated from his enemies, but to live side by side.

4 & 5: Parable of the Mustard Seed and Leaven (13:31-35)

Main point: The kingdom of God starts in very small, virtually invisible way-but (like the mustard plant and the leavening process) grows to extensive size and influence.

6: Parables of Treasure and Pearl (13:44-46)

Main point: The kingdom of God is often seen as small or inconspicuous, it is of great value-like a precious treasure.

7: Parable of the Dragnet (13:47-50)

Main point: In the mystery phase, the activity of God's kingdom will "gather up" even those who do not truly belong to Christ

Central themes of the kingdom

1. From humble origins to global status (Mt. 13:31,32. The mustard seed; Lk. 14:16-24. The dinner invitation).
2. Entered by grace through faith (Mt. 13:3-9; 18-23. The soils; Lk. 18:9-17. The Pharisee and the Publican).
3. Entering the kingdom produces joy, rejection of the kingdom results in judgment (Mt. 13:44-46. Joy of the kingdom; Mt. 13:47-50. judgment on those who resist the kingdom).

### **Introduction to Inspiration of Scripture**

Because of the Word's redemptive power, Satan attacks it. Historically, he has continued to attack its INSPIRATION (divine origin), CANONICITY (what books belong), INTERPRETATION

(how to determine its meaning), and APPLICATION. Over the next few weeks, we want to equip you in all of these areas so you are confident of the truthfulness of the Bible and confident about how to use it in your life and in ministry to others.

Specifically, you need to form deep convictions about the Bible's inspiration, and be able to defend it (1 Pet. 3:15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence...) - not prove it empirically, but defend it as reasonable.

### **Revelation & Speculation**

In the Bible we have revelation from the God of truth that provides the means for salvation and how we grow closer to Him. Revelation from God stands in marked contrast to men speculating about god.

(*Special*) *Revelation* is God disclosing truth about himself and his plan to humans that could not be otherwise known (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10).

Reveal (*apokalypto*) - To unveil something that was previously hidden or to bring into view something that was out of sight. It is a divine act in which God unveiled himself to man through a verbal form of communication over a period of time. He did this by choosing a select group of people to whom he communicated the reality about:

- himself
- humans
- the world (material & spiritual)
- the interrelationship of all of these

And He told those people to record his truth in the Bible.

Contrast to *speculation*: what humans think about God, ultimate reality, etc.

Is it possible for man to figure God out? If we study the way people are and the way the physical world operates, will we be able to make sense of it all and figure out how to live our lives?

Read 1 Cor 2:6-10; Isaiah 55:8-10.

Results of speculation:

Other world religions and belief systems (Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age, atheism, optimistic humanism, etc.) are mixtures of natural revelation and man's futile speculations about God (Rom. 1:18-23).

Christian Application: We also ignore revelation and follow our speculations. We don't want to be self-righteous Christians on this point. Our walk with God is marred regularly by our efforts to determine for ourselves what is best in:

- How to handle conflict
- What our character should be
- How to conduct our selves at work
- What worshipping God is
- Decisions we make, never considering how it will affect our spiritual growth as defined in the Bible

The key difference between revelation and speculation is the origin - from God or from within us.

### **Verbal Plenary Inspiration**

#### **Definition of Verbal Plenary Inspiration**

**Verbal** (the words are inspired) **Plenary** (all of the Bible is inspired) **Inspiration** (God breathed): *God so moved the human authors of scripture that the resulting product was the Word of God written, totally without error in all that it affirms in the original autographs, in every area including theology, history, geography and science.*

Why must it include accuracy in things like history, geography and science? Why not just theology?

Because if it can't be trusted in the areas that we can test, why should it be trusted in the areas we can't test?

"Inspiration" does NOT mean:

- People being emotionally moved by the beauty of creation or the pathos of human life, etc. That is the literary definition of inspiration, but this kind of inspiration has its origin in man, not God.

- Dictation in most cases (cf. 10 commandments), no "automatic handwriting" ("I'll just let God get a few pages done while I sleep.") God worked through human authors in a way that he used their particular style and cultural setting to present his truth.

2 Tim. 3:16\* All Scripture is *inspired* by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

"inspiration" = theopneustos: literally "God-breathed"

2 Pet. 1:20,21 \* - 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The message originates from God, whose Spirit "bears them along" as they record it.

There are two important qualifications within this definition of inspiration:

- "in the original autographs" - Only the original documents were completely without error. It is undeniable that there have been minor copyist errors.  
"What good does it do to believe in verbal plenary inspiration if we don't have the autographs?" The number of copies are so plentiful that we can identify most of the errors, and the copyist errors are so minor that they do not affect any major doctrine (YARD BAR analogy -even if the platinum bar at Bureau of Measures & Standards would be lost, we wouldn't be).  
"Why didn't God preserve them?" Maybe because he knew the human tendency to worship things like this (2 Kings 18:4).
  - "in all that it affirms" - What the word "affirms" or "intends" must include these considerations:  
*Figures of speech* - hyperbole (Luke 14:26); observational language e.g. "sunset"; anthropomorphisms (e.g. God is a door, a vine, hands of God, His wings - Deut. 32).  
*Precision* - Don't insist on modern accuracy levels; sometimes round numbers are used (e.g. mustard seed - Mark 4 says it's the smallest of all seeds when this isn't really true).  
*Narration does not equal affirmation* - Abraham w/ Sarah (lied twice!). Solomon had many wives & concubines.  
*Literary genres* - e.g., a parable shouldn't be held to reflect actual history - (Luke 18 - a parable usually only has one main point - this one is directed toward us being persistent in prayer but many ask why is the judge (whom they believe represents God) so begrudging.  
But narrative does record history. Some interpreters like Clark Pinnock consider some miraculous narrative events to be legend. For example, in Mt. 17:24-27 Christ teaches on submitting to government authority by paying taxes. In the passage, he instructs Peter to catch a fish and finds a coin in its mouth. Pinnock states that there wasn't literally a coin but this is a legend that makes a point regarding submission to the government (Clark H. Pinnock, "The Scripture Principle", p. 125). The problem is that this genre is historical narrative, therefore there was a coin because Matthew states there was).  
*Selective history does not equal errant history* - Since no claim to be exhaustive is made. (John 21:25)  
*Topical arrangement* - Not responsible for strict chronology unless another claims it (Matt. 8,9 - note the author makes it apparent these are sequential events).  
*Irregularities of grammar and spelling* - Grammar is only description of norms and changes (Paul's run-on sentences - normal then, not now) - punctuation added later.
- "Why does it matter that we have a high view of scripture?" (This ties into the assignment)
- Once you reject verbal plenary inspiration, there is no logical stopping place ("SLIPPERY SLOPE"). Some do stop at a fairly conservative place, but not because it is irrational to do otherwise.
  - Your view of scripture is closely related to your view of Christ himself. He has a very high view of scripture (as we will see), so it is impossible to denigrate scripture without denigrating him.
  - Your preaching and evangelism will lack confidence and power