

The Kingdom of Heaven

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The governing kingdom of Jesus' day was the Roman Empire. They oppressively ruled much of the world. Their political corruption and military power were constant fixtures in Israel. Yet, Jesus frequently spoke of another kingdom. Sometimes He referred to this as the kingdom of Heaven. On other occasions, He referred to this as the kingdom of God.

When Jesus began teaching and revealing Himself as the Messiah, this new kingdom was central to His message. The early discourse of Jesus was summarized by Matthew as being, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17).

The kingdom of Heaven is a curious concept to understand. Jesus often puzzled His audiences by talking about the kingdom. He would use parables to explain the kingdom. In the Parables by the Sea, Jesus taught the kingdom of Heaven was like...

1. A man who planted a field (Matt. 13:24-30).
2. A mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32).
3. Leaven (Matt. 13:33).
4. Hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44).
5. A merchant searching for fine pearls (Matt. 13:45-46).
6. A net that is thrown into the sea (Matt. 13:47-49).

When Jesus finished these parables, He asked the disciples, "Have you understood all these things?" They answered, "Yes" (Matt. 13:51). Then, Jesus told the disciples, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matt. 13:52). In other words, the disciples were to share their accumulated knowledge of the kingdom of Heaven with the world.

The Kingdom of Heaven Means...

Each of the parables of the kingdom of Heaven is important. They offer details about the nature of the kingdom and our relationship to it. Rather than explore these and other such parables, though, consider the broader importance of the description "kingdom of Heaven."

1. The kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom of God. The term "kingdom of Heaven" was used commonly by the Jews. Due to their reverence for the Creator, Jews rarely spoke or wrote the sacred name of God: *Yahweh*. They did not want to take His divine name in vain. Therefore, they would use the term "Heaven" or "Blessed" in place of God's name (i.e. Matt. 21:25; Mk. 14:61). Today, Jews still hold the name of God with the same reverence. As previously noted, Jesus used these descriptions interchangeably. They are one and the same.

2. The rule of God and Christ. If we were to view a map of the ancient Greco-Roman world, we would see the geographical bounds of the Roman Empire of Jesus' day. The Roman Empire had borders that encompassed small villages and sprawling cities. The Jewish vision of the Messiah's kingdom looked forward to the day when the borders of the Roman Empire would be redefined. The kingdom of Heaven; however, does not describe a place as much as it describes a reign or rule.

Jesus' teaching of the kingdom of Heaven was about people subjecting themselves to the rule of God. Likewise, we are to submit ourselves to the rule of God by faith in Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah: God's anointed. Throughout the history of Israel, God appointed kings for His people by having oil anointed on their heads. This signified God's approval of the king's reign. Instead of anointing with oil, God made Jesus King by a three-stage process: death, resurrection, and ascension (Eph. 1:18-23). Therefore, to become part of the kingdom of Heaven, we must obey King Jesus. He is Lord of All (Acts 10:36).

3. Presently exists with an eternal future. When sinners obey the Gospel, they become citizens of the kingdom of Heaven. We are rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's dear Son, Jesus (Col. 1:13). The kingdom of Heaven can be found where people are found who have submitted themselves to the saving reign of Jesus. This collection of saved citizens is the Church: another synonym of the kingdom.

Saved citizens are to expand the kingdom of Heaven. This is not done through military might or political process, but by preaching the Gospel of God. When sinners obey the Gospel, the kingdom of Heaven expands on earth. Citizens of the kingdom of Heaven can live in the hope of eternal life.

Additionally, the saving rule of Jesus reaches beyond our present existence. He will save His kingdom in death. Concerning the future of the kingdom of Heaven, Paul wrote, "Then comes the end, when he (Jesus DF) delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:24-26). When the last enemy is finally vanquished by the Lord of All, the kingdom of Heaven will forever rest in peace.

Conclusion

The kingdom of this world is in a constant state of turmoil. Sin continues to destroy people's lives. The consequences of sin are experienced unendingly. There is no hope in the kingdom of this world. It is on a collision course with the Creator. Yet, the kingdom of Heaven continues to call. The kingdom of Heaven is open to everyone willing to renounce sin and obey Jesus. We can live in hope of eternal life with the God of Heaven (Rev. 7:13-17).