

The Kingdom of God

Helpful Resources

Historical and Political Context (p.39), Maps of Palestine and Jerusalem (p.47, 48)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

As John the Baptist's brief ministry ended with his arrest, Jesus' ministry began. We witnessed His first miracle, His first sermon, His first conversation about the meaning and means of salvation (with Nicodemus), and His first cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Messiah was here, and soon His miracles and teaching created such a stir that He and His disciples were mobbed wherever they went. The focus of this review is the kingdom of God, which is mentioned 68 times in the New Testament. Both John and Jesus preached, "The kingdom of God is at hand..." (*Matt. 3:1, 2; Mk. 1:15*). But what exactly is the kingdom of God? How is it described, and how does one enter the kingdom of God?

- The Kingdom of God

There are three aspects of the kingdom of God:

1. **The Universe** (*Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:3*): Everything in heaven and earth was created by God and belongs to Him. They are His kingdom, and He is the sovereign King.
2. **Heaven**: Sometimes called "the kingdom of heaven" (32 times in *Matthew*), this aspect of the kingdom of God refers to the eternal, spiritual domain of Jesus (*Matt. 19:23, 24*).

This kingdom is "not of this world" (*Jn. 18:36*). To enter this kingdom requires repentance (*Matt. 3:1, 2; 4:17; Mk. 1:15*). One must be "born again" to enter this kingdom, meaning he must believe or put his faith in Jesus for salvation or forgiveness of sin (*Jn. 3:5-7; Mk. 10:15; Acts 28:31; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:9; 15:50*). Since Jesus is salvation, He was the kingdom of God in the flesh (*Lk. 17:20, 21*).

3. **Christ's Earthly Kingdom** (*Isa. 9:6, 7; Dan. 2:44*): There is a physical kingdom of God that Jesus will establish on earth in the end times (*Mk. 15:43; Acts. 1:6; Lk. 24:21*).

- Out With the Old, In With the New

Since the kingdom of God was "at hand," meaning present in the person of Jesus, He would introduce a new covenant (testament) to fulfill and replace the old covenant (testament). We saw a glimpse of this transition in Jesus' first miracle (*Jn. 2:1-10*). He brought a "new wine" (New Testament), and it was better than that which was served first (Old Testament).

We also saw this transition occur with the end of John's ministry. John the Baptist represented the last of the Old Testament prophets. When Jesus arrived (New Testament), John's disciples began to follow Jesus. Then, John was arrested and imprisoned. Even John recognized this transition when he spoke of his role to point others to Christ (*Jn. 3:22-36*).

- Prophetic Passages

The purpose of prophecy was to build faith and confidence in God's Word (*Jn. 2:22*).

1. **Ministry in Galilee** (*Matt. 4:14-16; Isa. 9:1, 2; 42:6, 7*): Jesus spent much of His ministry around the Sea of Galilee, with his headquarters in Capernaum.
2. **Zeal for the Temple** (*John 2:17; Ps. 69:9*): When Jesus cleansed the Temple of greedy men, people linked Him to the psalmist who had a passion for the house of God.
3. **Destroy This Temple** (*John 2:19-21*): Jesus predicted that the temple would be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. He was, of course, referring to Himself. This comment would later be used against Jesus during His trials (*Matt. 26:61*).
4. **Moses' Staff** (*John 3:13-15; Num. 21:4-9*): When the Israelites sinned against the Lord in the desert, they were bitten by serpents. God rescued them through Moses' staff. That staff was a type or picture of Christ. Those who look on the cross will be saved from sin.

- Personal Application

1. **John's Farewell Address** (*Jn. 3:22-36*): As great as John was, he was content to play his role and point others to Christ. He had every reason to be prideful, but instead he chose humility. If only we had this same attitude, to remove ourselves from the spotlight and shine the light instead on Jesus. "He must increase, but we must decrease."
2. **Gospel Conversation** (*Jn. 4:7-26*): Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman is fascinating, not only in its content but also in Jesus' approach to sharing the gospel. First, He went to a place where people gather and started a conversation. Second, though He started a discussion about water, He swung the conversation to spiritual topics (i.e., worldview, worship, gospel). Third, Jesus created in the woman a desire for the good news of salvation by talking of eternal life and the bad news of sin (multiple husbands).
3. **Look on the Fields** (*Jn. 4:31-42*): It is a common misconception that missions can only happen overseas, and ministry only happens in the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus challenged the disciples to "lift up their eyes" and see that there are people all around them who need Jesus. All we have to do is get to work and tell them. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." Are you in the field laboring?

The Bottom Line

Jesus is the kingdom of God (salvation), and our role is to point others to that kingdom.

Questions to Consider

1. What is so difficult about being content with our role and circumstances? What is required of us to allow Jesus to increase and ourselves to decrease?
2. Are you guilty of believing the lie that missions only happen overseas, and ministry only happens in the church? When, where, and how are you actively sharing Christ with the "people at the well"?
3. What is your favorite or most effective way to share the gospel?
4. Start a conversation with a non-believer. Talk about a non-spiritual topic but then swing the conversation to spiritual things. Who knows where the Lord will take it from here!