

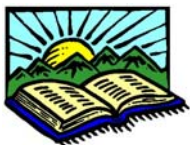
My Father's Kingdom

One of the more misunderstood concepts in the New Testament is the answer to the question ‘What is the kingdom?’ Many today would answer the question by saying that the kingdom is a period of one thousand years after Christ returns. Some would say it is a physical earthly kingdom, some would say it is a spiritual heavenly kingdom, and some would even say that they just do not know. I would like to explore which of these answers, if any, is consistent with what scripture really teaches us. Let us take a close look at what scripture says, and what it doesn't say, to see if we can figure it out for ourselves.

First, we need to start by looking at what the concept of the kingdom would mean to a first century Jew, when the New Testament was written. Due to their training, they would most likely think of 2 Samuel 7, when God established His covenant with David, which contained two key promises. In verses 12-16, God says that He will establish the kingdom of the seed of David, and that He will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Consequently, the first century Jews were expecting a king and a kingdom like that of David, the warrior king, and not one like the Messiah actually came to set up. Even the disciples, after spending three and a half years with Jesus, still thought He would be a king and set up a kingdom like David's. We see this in Acts 1:6, when they ask “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” But Christ had a different kingdom in mind. Maybe this is why Jesus thought He didn't need to answer them directly; they would get their answer soon enough, when the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them.

In Daniel

In Daniel's vision of the four beasts (Da 7) we get an early picture of the New Testament kingdom that would come. Daniel sees one like the Son of man coming with clouds of heaven to the Ancient of days; and there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting one, which will not pass away, and His kingdom will not be destroyed (Da 7:13-14). Here Daniel sees from a heavenly perspective what the disciples also saw from an earthly perspective in Acts 1:9, after they asked about the kingdom being restored to Israel. And so in these verses in Acts and Daniel we see our Lord ascending into heaven on a



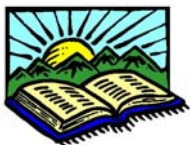
cloud, coming before the Father, and receiving dominion and power over the Father's kingdom. This is when the King sits down at the right hand of the Father (Ro 8:34, Eph 1:20-22, He 10:12, 1Pe 3:22) and takes the reigns of His kingdom forever.

In Daniel's interpretation of these verses he tells us that the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him (Da 7:27). Daniel tells us here that this kingdom that the Son of man will be given will also belong to the saints of the most High, and they will possess it forever (Da 7:18, 22). The saints, according to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, James Orr general editor, are the people of righteousness or goodness. We also know from Romans 1:7 that the beloved of God are called to be saints; from 1 Corinthians 1:2 that those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus are called to be saints; from Ephesians 1:1 that the faithful in Christ Jesus are the saints at Ephesus; and there are many more New Testament verses that tell us very clearly that the saints are the true believers and followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so here we have Daniel telling us, long before it ever began, that the kingdom will be given to Christ and, through Him, to all who believe.

We also see in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great image (Da 2), that is broken into pieces by a stone which was cut out without hands (Da 2:34), a picture of the kingdom that is to come. We see the four successive kingdoms of Babylon, the Medes and the Persians, Greece, and Rome (Da 2:37-43); and in the days of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, and this kingdom will break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever (Da 2:44). Just as in Daniel's vision, in Nebuchadnezzar's dream we see the coming of Christ, at His incarnation, to set up His everlasting kingdom; one which would eventually destroy and consume all the others.

In Isaiah

We know from Isaiah 9:6-7, speaking about the result of the incarnation of Christ, that the government will be put upon His shoulders and it will increase, and peace will increase, both without end, and He will rule His kingdom from the throne of David. There is no disputing that this is about Christ, and His incarnation (see Lk 2:11). The only question we could have, based on these verses, is 'When?'. Did His kingdom start at His birth, at His ascension, or at some time future to us? We get our answer from the Daniel 7:13-14 and Acts 1:9 passages; assuming you agree with me that they are describing the same event. Christ's kingdom starts at His ascension, when He sits down at the right hand of the Father and receives dominion, and glory, and His kingdom.



The New Testament

Now let's take a detailed look at the New Testament verses that talk about the kingdom; they are in no particular order, other than that in which they appear in scripture.

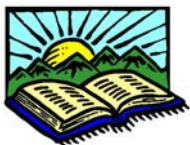
In Matthew

Matthew 3:2, 4:17

We have both John the Baptist (Mt 3:2) and Jesus (Mt 4:17) very early on in the New Testament telling the Jews to “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. They are both asking the people to turn away from their sins against God, and to turn back to the God of their fathers in obedience. There is a sense of urgency conveyed because the kingdom of heaven, as prophesied by Daniel, is at hand; that is, close by, soon to come upon them, most likely within their immediate lifetime, and in a way that would be relevant to them. Even though some would like us to think otherwise, the meaning of “at hand” in common everyday discourse can only mean that its subject will present itself within the hearer’s immediate future. And we know from the Daniel 7 and Acts 1 connection, previously mentioned, that “at hand” is referring to approximately three and a half years in the future, when Christ ascends into heaven to take His rightful place as King at the right hand of the Father; and that hearers of these words of John and Jesus are being given an early glimpse into the face of the King and of the kingdom..

Matthew 4:23, 9:35

“Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Mt 4:23, 9:35). Here Matthew tells us that Jesus was teaching in the synagogue of the Jews, teaching them how the scripture spoke about Him; the scripture at this time meant the Tenach, the Old Testament, since the New was not yet written. We also have a great example of this when Jesus reads from Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth; when He sits down He says “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Lk 4:16-21). So what is this “gospel of the kingdom” that He preached? Well, we know the gospel, the good news, is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1Co 15:3-4), and by this gospel we are saved (1Co 15:1-2); the broken-hearted are healed, the captives are delivered, the blind see, the oppressed are set free, and the acceptable year of the Lord is proclaimed (Lk 4:18-19). And so those who are broken-hearted, captive, blind, and oppressed are the ones to whom the good news is given, the ones who believe and are saved;



these are the members of Christ's body, and the members of the kingdom. Jesus was preaching the gospel of the kingdom; that is, the good news preached to those who would hear, believe, and be saved, and therefore become part of His kingdom.

At this point we have made an important first step in our understanding of the kingdom; we know that it is made up of those who have repented, believe, and are saved. But let's keep going so we can see what else we can learn from Scripture.

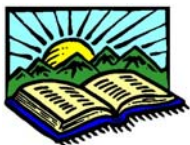
Matthew 5:3

At the very beginning of the sermon on the mount, Jesus says "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3, also see Lk 6:20). We are all "poor in spirit", so what makes this so important that Jesus would use it as His opening salvo against the Jews, their leadership, and their replacement of God's laws and ordinances with the precepts of men? Even though we are all poor in spirit, we don't always want to acknowledge that fact, let alone acknowledge that the only way not to be poor in spirit is to submit ourselves to the commands of God. And so, being poor in spirit means that we are willing to humble ourselves before the living God, to submit ourselves to His rule and authority, to His commandments and ordinances, to realize and acknowledge that only He can save us through faith by His grace. Poor in spirit describes our inner condition, the internal realization that our spirit needs God to fulfill us and to lead us faithfully through this life, knowing we cannot get to the promised inheritance of Christ on our own; and we are only this way if we belong to Christ, having been saved. These are God's people who are poor in spirit, and the ones to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.

Matthew 5:10

Jesus also says "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10). What does it mean to be "persecuted for righteousness' sake"? What does it mean to be righteous? Comparing Psalm 14:1 with its quote in Romans 3:10, we get the description of a righteous person, one who does good, one whose heart is set on putting into practice God's divine commands. Noah Webster, in his 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language, says "The righteous, in Scripture, denotes the servants of God, the saints." Therefore, we can now say that one who is persecuted for righteousness' sake is one who is persecuted merely because they are one of Christ's followers, one who puts into everyday practice the commands of God, and most likely one who is very obvious about it, either in speech or in deeds or both, while still remaining humble before the Lord. Again we see that these are God's people, who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, and therefore are the ones to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.

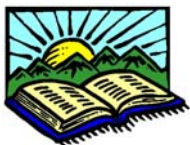
Matthew 5:17-18



After Jesus says He came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Mt 5:17-18), He says “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5:19-20). Interestingly, we see here a broad range of people who are in the kingdom of heaven, from one who breaks the least commandment and teaches others to do the same, to one who follows the commandments, who practices obedience everyday, and teaches others to do the same, from the least to the greatest in the kingdom. One thing strikes me as odd. How can I be in the kingdom of heaven if I break any of the commandments, and then teach others to follow my lead in doing the same? Christ is surely showing much more mercy to a commandment breaker than I think He should; that is, until I consider my own behavior, knowing that there is no way I could ever be completely obedient to any commandment, even the least of them. So I can only assume that we are faced here with a believer who unintentionally breaks one of the commandments, and by doing so sets the wrong example for others, who are weaker and could possibly follow in my errant footsteps. This undoubtedly has to be the wood, hay, and stubble of 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. Then Jesus goes on to say that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees we cannot even enter into the kingdom of heaven. The comparison is quite clear here. The scribes and Pharisees taught the Israelites to follow the precepts of men, not the commands of God, and they intentional followed the desires of their own heart, and in so doing caused others to stumble. We know that the Old Testament sacrifice only covered unintentional sin (see Lv 4:2, 5:15), and anyone who intentionally sinned against the Lord blasphemed against Him and was to be cut off from the Lord because of his iniquity (Nu 15:30-31). So our righteousness has to exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees; that is, we cannot have our heart set on breaking the Lord’s commands. We must have it set on obedience. Obedience must be the desire of our heart every minute of every day, even if we do stumble unintentionally. We must also teach others, if only by example, to do the same. Then, and then only, can we enter into the kingdom of heaven, having proved ourselves worthy to be called one of Christ’s, a true believer.

Matthew 6:10

When Jesus teaches His disciples how they should pray, He includes the phrase “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10, also see Lk 11:2). Here we know that Jesus’ prayer is speaking to the Father (see Mt 6:9); and so He is praying that the Father’s kingdom would come, and that the Father’s will would be done on earth just as in heaven. Is it the coming of the Father’s kingdom that brings on the doing of the His will on earth; or is it the doing of the Father’s will on earth that brings on His kingdom; or are they not at all related? They are related. More importantly, we know that whoever



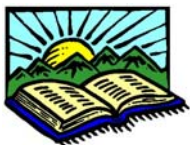
does the will of the Father will be allowed to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mt 7:21). But what does it mean to do the will of the Father? Jesus answers this question for us, when he says “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (Jn 6:38); and then He goes on to say “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn 6:40). And so we see that the Father’s kingdom is coming, and with it His will. He will do all His pleasure (Is 46:10), and what He speaks He will bring to pass, and what He purposes He will do (Is 46:11). Anyone who sees Jesus Christ and believes is he who does the will of the Father, and therefore can enter into the Father’s kingdom.

Matthew 6:13

At the close of Jesus’ prayer to the Father, He says “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” (Mt 6:13). Here Jesus teaches, both His disciples and us, that we are to acknowledge that the kingdom belongs to the Father, and it will come upon those who are His, and that His will will be done. Even though the kingdom is given to Jesus to reign over (as we see in Da 7:13-14), it still belongs to the Father, insofar as Jesus, even in His role as King, is eternally subordinate to the Father in all things (see 1Co 15:24-28).

Matthew 6:24-33

Jesus tells us that we cannot serve two masters (Mt 6:24), therefore we should give no thought to life, or food, or drink, or clothes (Mt 6:25), since it is God who provides and who knows what we need (Mt 6:26-32). Then Jesus says “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt 6:33). We are to seek first, before all else, the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; than is we are to seek God’s face, we are to seek to be righteous as He is righteous, and we are to seek His kingdom, the place where He dwells and rules in our hearts. That which we seek is spiritual, and in return God will not forsake us (Ps 90:10), for He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him through faith (He 11:6). We are to set the material world and our material cares aside so that we can diligently seek a spiritual relationship with the living God of all creation. Then, and only then, will we not have to trouble ourselves, or be burdened, with the things of this world: life, food, drink, and clothes. We need not give any thought to these things, for the Lord our God and Father will work out all things according to the good pleasure of His will; and I cannot do one little thing about it, except to remain obedient in my desires to seek His will and my patience to wait upon Him. It wasn’t until I completely realized this, accepted it, and stopped fighting to take some control over my daily life, that I truly felt at peace with God, and at home in His kingdom.



Matthew 7:21-23

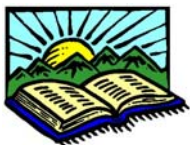
“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mt 7:21). This is a picture of those who come to Jesus and say “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” (Mt 7:22). Here we have the description of those people who profess the name of Jesus Christ, but are not truly saved. They can profess His name, they can pray and do good works in His name, but they have not been transformed from the inside out. Their hearts are not His, they do not love Him with all their heart, and all their mind, and all their soul. They are doing their own works, the works of iniquity (Mt 7:23), and not the works of the Father; and therefore they are not true believers; and verse 21 tells us that only true believers, those who do the will of the Father, and the work of the Father, because they are Christ’s, can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 8:5-12

When Jesus enters into Capernaum, a centurion comes to Him, asking that He heal his servant; and when Jesus says He will come, the centurion responds by saying that he doesn’t need to, knowing that Jesus could just say the word and his servant would be healed (Mt 8:5-9). Jesus marveled at his great faith, the faith of a Gentile, a faith which could not be found in all Israel (Mt 8:10). Then Jesus says “That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt 8:11-12). Jesus is making a very clear statement to those who are following Him, that many would come from all over, from outside Israel, Gentiles like the centurion, and they would have great faith in Him and in His words like the centurion; and their great faith would be like Abraham’s, and Isaac’s, and Jacob’s; it would be counted as righteousness; it would be a saving faith, and therefore the Gentiles would be able to sit at the table of the patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is also saying that the natural children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Jews, would be cast out of the kingdom because of their unbelief, because they have no faith and are not to be saved; but those who are not the natural children of the kingdom will be welcomed in with opened arms and will be made the true children of the kingdom. We see from this passage that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who have a great faith, like faithful Abraham, and are therefore saved.

Matthew 10:5-8

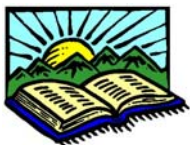
When Jesus sends out His twelve disciples, He tells them to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 10:5-6); then He tells them “as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 10:7), and to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils, and since they received freely they are to give freely (Mt 10:8). Again we have Jesus saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand, close by, soon to come upon the house of Israel; a message



intended for the lost sheep of Israel, the Jews, as we saw earlier (see discussion of Mt 3:2, 4:17). Jesus makes a very strong point of telling the lost sheep, those who are part of God's remnant, that the kingdom of heaven, as described in Daniel 2 and 7, is close by and about to be fulfilled; that is, at hand. Jesus' mission was to bring salvation to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles; the kingdom of heaven is for those who were lost, but now are found; it is for the saved.

Matthew 11:9-12

Jesus tells us that John the Baptist is more than a prophet (Mt 11:9), and then goes on to say "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." (Mt 11:11-12). Jesus makes it very clear that John is the greatest of God's prophets ever to be born; of course Jesus is not including Himself in the group, since although He was also born of a woman, He is the Son of God, for which there is no comparison. Why is there no prophet greater than John? Not only does John bring the prophetic message of "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2), he is also the messenger sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Mt 10:10, Mal 3:1, 4:5), to prepare the Jewish people for the coming of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. John spoke of Jesus' coming, and that He would be the lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29), and then he baptized our Lord to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15). He is therefore the greatest in his role of prophet; since he points the way to the coming Messiah as forerunner, and then, when Jesus shows up on the scene, he announces His presence to the world, and then, to top off the blessing given to him by God, he gets to baptize Jesus so that He could start His public ministry in righteousness, ceremonially clean, the way the Father required it. All the other prophets that came before John could only tell of the future coming of the Messiah; none of them had the blessing of announcing to the world that He is present and ready to begin His work. With all of that, Jesus says that those who are least in the kingdom of heaven are greater than John. Why did Jesus say this? While John was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets because his role in God's plan was to announce the presence of the Messiah in the midst of the Jews, he was still only an Old Testament prophet; and like all Old Testament prophets, he was only able to point to Christ, and speak of a vaguely veiled view of what the Messiah would do when He came; He would redeem His people like Moses, He would be a King like David, and He would take away the sin of the world. But they didn't see or know the rest of God's story. They didn't know that He would die in their place, for their sin, as their atoning sacrifice; and they didn't know that He would be raised from the dead as living proof He was who He said He was; and they didn't know that He would give us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would teach us how to live as He lived, to walk as He walked, and to crucify ourselves as He was crucified for us. John just saw vaguely what we



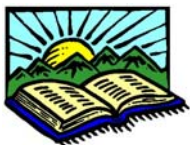
now see clearly, the Messiah and all He came to do. Then Jesus goes on to say that from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence. A better translation for “suffers violence” would be “is taken by storm”; the same Greek word is translated “presses in” in Luke 16:16; and if I combine the two verses (Mt 11:12 and Lk 16:16) we have the following: the law and the prophets were until John, and from the days of John on the kingdom of heaven is preached, and those who hear the gospel of the kingdom and truly believe will do anything humanly possible to hold on to it, and to enter in, thereby appearing to take it by force. There are no lukewarm believers in the kingdom of heaven. Each and every one of us will passionately work out our salvation with fear and trembling, in obedience, for it is God who works in us to will and to do His good pleasure (Php 2:12-13).

Matthew 12:22-28

After Jesus healed a man who was deaf and dumb due to demon possession, the Pharisees accuse Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of demons (Mt 12:22-24). Jesus, knowing what was in their hearts, says to the Pharisees “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.” (Mt 12:25-28, see Mk 3:23-26). Jesus tells them that every kingdom divided against itself will be brought to desolation, will be destroyed, and cannot stand, whether it is the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of God. So that if Jesus casts out demons by the power of the ruler of demons, Beelzebub, the kingdom of Satan would come to destruction, and who would want to destroy his own kingdom. But if Jesus casts out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon them, into their midst. And so we can conclude that what Jesus is saying is that by casting out demons by the Spirit of God He is making manifest the power and rule and authority and presence of the Father within their midst, that is, the kingdom of the Father has come upon them.

Matthew 13:10-17

The disciples ask Jesus “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” (Mt 13:10); and Jesus answers “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given” (Mt 13:11, see Mk 4:11). Think about this. The disciples get to know the mysteries, the hidden truths, but the people to whom He was telling His parables did not. Why were the disciples allowed to know, but not the others? Well, Jesus goes on to tell them, and us, in the following verses, using a quote from Isaiah 6, when the prophet was commissioned by the Lord. The Lord tells Isaiah to go and tell the people of Israel that they will hear his words but they will not understand them, and they will be able to see what he is telling them but they will not be able to perceive his message. The Lord will make the heart of the people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; otherwise, they will see with their



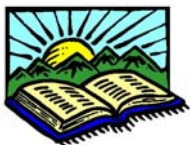
eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed, that is, be saved. (See Is 6:9-10, Mt 13:14-15, Mk 4:12.) Then Jesus goes on to say that the disciples are blessed because they can see with their eyes, and hear with their ears (Mt 13:16), and that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what they see, and have not, and to hear what they hear, and have not (Mt 13:17). So what makes the disciples so much greater than the prophets and righteous men of the past? The answer is clear to me. The disciples see Jesus, and they hear His words, and they understand with their heart, and they are healed, converted, that is, saved. And so these newly revealed truths of the kingdom are revealed to the disciples clearly, whereas the prophets and righteous men of old had only heavily veiled references to the kingdom of heaven, and to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and to His work of salvation. These newly revealed mysteries tell us, those who see and hear and understand, exactly what the kingdom of heaven is; that is, where all Jesus' disciples dwell in the comfort of the Father's mercy and grace, where He will soon become sovereign ruler over all His redeemed followers, and foreshadows where He will eventually bring them to dwell with Him forever.

Matthew 13:18-23

When Jesus explains the parable of the sower (Mt 13:18, Mk 4:13), He describes the word of the kingdom very clearly with the analogy of the seed that is sown (Mk 4:14). The seed that falls by the wayside is the word of God sown in the listener's heart, but then is snatched away by the wicked one, Satan (Mt 13:19, Mk 4:15). The seed that falls into stony places is the word of God that is heard and joyfully received, but since it has no root it endures until tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, and therefore the hearer is offended (Mt 13:20-21, Mk 4:16-17). The seed that falls among thorns is the word of God that is heard and seems to take root, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke off the word, and the hearer becomes unfruitful (Mt 13:22, Mk 4:18-19). The seed that falls into good ground is the word of God that is heard and understood, and therefore bears fruit many times the amount sown (Mt 13:23, Mk 4:20). In Jesus' explanation of His parable, the word of the kingdom is the gospel message, which when heard will only take root in some people's heart, and then they will grow in the word, and become fruitful by sowing the gospel message in other people's hearts; and therefore the gospel message is the word of the kingdom sown in the hearts of true believers, who hear and understand and are saved, and who enter into the kingdom (Mt 7:21, 18:3, Jn 3:3, 5), and will become the true children of the kingdom (Mt 8:11-12).

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

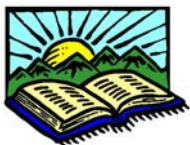
Continuing the theme of sowing, Jesus says "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way." (Mt 13:24-25). We all know this parable of the wheat and the tares. When the servants of the householder realized there were tares, or weeds that



resemble wheat when young and growing, sown in with the good wheat they wanted to gather up the tares immediately (Mt 13:26-28); but the householder tells them to wait for the harvest so as not to mistakenly gather up some of the wheat with the tares, and at the harvest the tares will be gathered up first and burned and the wheat will be gathered into his barn (Mt 13:29-30). Jesus also interprets this parable for His disciples, telling them the one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one, the enemy that sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels (Mt 13:37-39). Jesus goes on to say that at the end of the world the Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all people who offend and who do iniquity, and will cast them into the furnace of fire, and then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Mt 13:40-43). From this parable and Jesus' interpretation, can you tell me what is the kingdom of heaven? The kingdom of heaven is the place where the children of the kingdom dwell; and the children are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that He died for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day, conquering death, and then He ascended into heaven on the clouds and sat down at the right hand of the Father. This parable also tells us that the kingdom of heaven, for now, will also have children of the wicked one intermingled with the children of heaven, masquerading as the good seed, deceiving others, until the end of the world, when God will send forth His angels to gather His elect into heaven, His true kingdom. And so we see that the kingdom of heaven here on earth is merely a foreshadow of the true kingdom in heaven, where true believers will spend eternity with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the King.

Matthew 13:31-32

Here we have a small parable where Jesus says "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." (Mt 13:31-32, Mk 4:30-32). Jesus does not give us His interpretation of this parable, and so we are left to deduce the meaning on our own. What is Jesus saying about the kingdom of heaven in this parable? I think He is saying that the kingdom of heaven, like a mustard seed, starts out very small and of no consequence, small in stature, but when it is planted, and watered, and fed, and cared for, grows up into a tree larger than all the trees of all the other herbs; and when fully grown, it provides lodging and shelter for the birds of the air. We know from previous verses we looked at, that the kingdom of heaven is made up of true believers, and those who appear on the surface to be true believers; and here we see that the kingdom starts out very small and grows into something that will provide safe lodging and shelter to outsiders, those who do not believe, to the birds of the air. The kingdom of heaven is a refuge for both believers and non-believers alike, at least during this present age.

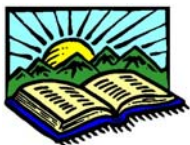


Matthew 13:33

Jesus then tells another small parable to the people, saying “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.” (Mt 13:33, Lk 13:20-21). This is an interesting little parable, which appears to be backward. Why do I say this? Do you know the typical symbolism of leaven in Scripture? Typically leaven represents sin. “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (1Co 5:6-8). Here Paul is telling the Corinthians to remove the one who has sinned from the body, the church, since the body is to be without sin; and therefore, we have leaven representing sin. Yet in Matthew 13:33 the parable seems to equate the kingdom of heaven with the leaven; and if we use the typical meaning for leaven, then Jesus is telling them that the kingdom of heaven is likened to sin, and when introduced, the sin will spread throughout the entire kingdom, until it is all sin all the time. We know, however, that Jesus is not saying that the kingdom “is” sin, but that it “is like” sin; which means that the kingdom of heaven, when introduced to the world, and will work its way throughout the entire world, until the whole world becomes the kingdom of heaven. Of course, we know that the whole world will not become the kingdom of heaven until Jesus returns to gather His elect, and to judge unbelief; but we do know it will happen; it’s just a matter of when.

Matthew 13:44

After His explanation of the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus tells His disciples another small parable; He says “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.” (Mt 13:44). Here the kingdom of heaven is equated to treasure, a treasure so valuable that when found is immediately hidden in a field until all worldly possessions can be sold off in order to buy the field. Paul says he counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ his Lord, for whom he willingly suffered the loss of all things so that he might win Christ (Php 3:7-8). This is the same idea as the parable spoken by Jesus in Matthew 13:44. The kingdom of heaven is so valuable, and so joyful, when we realize it, that we are willing to forsake all human comforts and all worldly possessions so that we might have the greater treasure, the knowledge of and an intimate relationship with the King, our Lord Jesus Christ. All else is counted as dung. This is a question we have to ask ourselves every day. Am I willing to put my relationship with Jesus Christ ahead of everything else in my life? If the actions of your life isn’t a resounding “yes” then you need to rethink your commitment to Him, and you need to reexamine why not.



Matthew 13:45-46

Again Jesus spoke a short parable, saying “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” (Mt 13:45-46). In this parable the kingdom of heaven is likened to a merchant man, who is seeking beautiful pearls. In the previous parable the kingdom was likened to the treasure, but here it is likened to a person seeking pearls, a treasure of sorts. The previous one was focused on the treasure of the kingdom, you and I, believers, and this one focuses on the one seeking the treasure, Christ the King. Here we see a picture of Jesus looking for great treasure, one of His own, and when He finds one that the Father has given Him, He sells all He has in order to purchase the treasured one. We were bought with a price, and that price was what Jesus was willing to give up to buy each one of us. Jesus gave up His life so that we may live in the kingdom of heaven, so that we may be saved by grace through faith in Him, and in His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. There is no greater price that He could pay for you, for me, for each one of His own, than that of His own life.

Matthew 13:47-50

Again Jesus gives His disciples a parable, saying “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt 13:47-50). In this parable we have the kingdom of heaven likened to a net, a fishing net, fishing for souls throughout the sea of this life. The kingdom of heaven, the net, draws people into itself via the gospel message, and like the parable of the wheat and the tares, this one also includes both true believers and those who are not. The good fish, that is the true believer, is gathered into vessels and kept until the end, faithfully guarded from destruction; but the wicked are cast away at the end of the world, the end of the church age, when the Lord’s angels will come, gather them up, and cast them into the furnace, and they will be burned up by the fire. We have here a picture of the true believer being gathered into heaven, and the rest of humanity being cast into the lake of fire, the second death, at the end of the world.