

INSURGENCE

The Revolutionary Nature of the Kingdom of God

INDIVIDUAL GUIDE

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*Preparing Christians to stand firm now and through difficult times.
Preparing Christians to minister with greater fruitfulness now
and through difficult times.*

OUR MESSAGE

We are living in unusual days and believe that greater national challenges likely lie ahead. While this might be unsettling to many, our message is to help people discern the hour and respond in faith, not fear. Indeed, in the midst of tumultuous days, *Forerunners of America* is believing God for the greatest spiritual harvest our nation has seen in generations.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

We desire to see five outcomes wherever our message is presented:

- 1 A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S "NOW" MESSAGE FOR HIS CHURCH AND OUR NATION**
(Jeremiah 23:22; Ezekiel 3:17; Colossians 1:28-29)
- 2 A GREATER HEART FOR THE LOST AND LEADING PEOPLE TO FAITH IN CHRIST**
(Matthew 9:35-37; Luke 19:10; Acts 1:8)
- 3 UNITY WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THROUGHOUT THE BODY OF CHRIST**
(John 17:23; 1 Peter 3:8-9; Colossians 3:15)
- 4 A BALANCE OF GOD'S GRACE AND A HEALTHY FEAR OF THE LORD**
(1 Cor. 15:9-10; Psalm 34:7-14; Proverbs 9:10)
- 5 HEARTS THAT WILL CRY OUT TO GOD FOR MERCY FOR OUR NATION**
(Psalm 130:1-8; Zephaniah 2:1-3)

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This study is designed to guide individuals through a self-discovery process. To facilitate this, each lesson includes a combination of insights, discussion questions, and insight answers to those discussion questions. These **answers can be found at the end of each lesson and are an integral element to this study**. After answering the questions, users are strongly encouraged to read the provided answers, recognizing that these **answers are by no means exclusive or exhaustive**. Rather they are intended to serve as additional insights.

This study incorporates a lot of Scripture. For convenience, Scripture references have been **set apart in red text**. Those references in bold are passages we especially encourage users to look up and read.

The goal of this 10-part study is to understand how God has chosen to use His people to displace the Kingdom of Darkness with the Kingdom of His Beloved Son (**Col. 1:13–14**). *Insurgence* lays the theological groundwork necessary for us to confidently continue the insurgence of God's Kingdom that Jesus began.

For those who find this study useful, a teacher's guide designed for small groups and church Sunday schools can be freely downloaded at www.ForerunnersOfAmerica.org. **We hope that you will consider facilitating a small group to share this information** with your friends and loved ones.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

LESSON 1

PURPOSE FOR THIS STUDY

The cross is not the end of the biblical narrative; rather, it is the turning point in Scripture. The cross is merely God's means of providing a way for mankind to return to Him and His original purpose and design for creation. In other words, the Bible is not a story about Jesus' journey to the cross. Instead, it is a story about God's Kingdom and mankind's role in that Kingdom.

Due to our rebellion, we forfeited our role in God's Kingdom. However, God is not content to relinquish what He began. Instead, He has chosen to redeem His creation and to restore mankind as His representative rulers over creation. It is for this reason that Jesus began an insurgence more than 2,000 years ago.

The dictionary defines an insurgence as a rebellion, revolt, or insurrection. We know that the "whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19) who is called the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2) and the "ruler of the world" (John 14:30). However, God is calling Christians to displace this Kingdom of Darkness with the Kingdom of His Beloved Son (Col. 1:13-14). Therefore, the objective of this study is to lay the theological groundwork necessary for us to confidently continue the insurgence of God's Kingdom that Jesus began.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus was a revolutionary who came preaching a radical message. He was not rejected by His own people and put to death because of His behavior. Instead, He was crucified because of the truth claims that He made and the message that He preached.

Question 1: According to Matthew 4:23; 9:35, and Mark 1:14-15, what was Jesus' essential message? What was at the core of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels?

Insight:

Jesus' message and mission centered around the Kingdom of God:

- The gospel writers summarized Jesus' ministry as a proclamation and a demonstration of God's Kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14–15).
- Jesus described His mission by saying that He must preach the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43).
- Time and again, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 8:1).
- Jesus' most famous sermon—the Sermon on the Mount—began with an invitation to enter God's Kingdom (Matt. 5:3).
- Many of Jesus' parables centered around the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:1–50; 18:21–35; 20:1–16; 21:28–22:14; 25:1–30; Mark 4:26–29).
- When Jesus sent out the 12 and the 72 disciples, He only told them to say one thing—“The Kingdom of God is at hand” (Matt. 10:5–7; Luke 10:1, 9).
- When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He included a plea for His Father's Kingdom to be established on Earth (Matt. 6:9–10).
- Even in Jesus' final moments on Earth after He arose from the dead, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

There are more than 90 references to the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Therefore, it is not surprising that when Jesus commanded His followers to teach others all that He had taught them, they understood this to mean that they too must proclaim the Kingdom of God. In the book of Acts—an historical account of the early church—we find Jesus' followers repeatedly preaching the Kingdom of God (Acts 8:12; 14:21–22; 19:8; 20:24–25; 28:23, 30–31).

LESSON

Question 2: According to Mark 1:14–15, how does Jesus define the gospel?

Insight:

Jesus preached the “gospel of the Kingdom.” This is shorthand for “the good news of the Kingdom of God.” Today's meanings and associations surrounding the word gospel are based upon 2,000 years of church history. It is often used as a technical term to refer to

God's plan of salvation and the doctrines surrounding it, but in Jesus' time, gospel was a common word that simply meant good news. The word "gospel" is defined as "glad tidings" or "a declaration of good news." According to the Mark, the focus of the gospel message is the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

Question 3: What does it mean that the Kingdom of God is at hand?

Insight:

To understand Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God, we need to take some time to understand the historical context of this phrase. The Kingdom of God refers to the time of the end. It looks forward to when the Messiah will arrive and put an end to this current age, ushering in the age to come. This Messiah will rule over the nations (**Psa. 2:1–12**) and will usher in an unending kingdom of justice and righteousness (**Psa. 72:1–19**).

Originally, the Israelites looked for the Messiah—the Lord's Anointed One—to be essentially a second King David. David had been idealized as the model king. In the time since David's reign, many kings had come and gone, and most of them were not good kings, but God had blessed and performed mighty works under David's reign. Furthermore, under David Israel had been a mighty nation, but since then, Israel had divided into two nations. So, the Israelites looked for a Messiah who would re-unite Israel and return the nation to its former glory by serving as the new King David. This made sense because God had promised that David's line would rule forever (**2 Sam. 7:16**).

Originally, the Israelites had a "make Israel great again" perspective of the Kingdom of God. Israel was once a great nation where God's power was evident, but then Israel fell upon difficult times. However, if Israel could just get the right king to lead them in the principles and values upon which their nation had been founded, then Israel would once again become a great nation where God's power is evident. At that point, this new king would then grow the revived nation of Israel into a global kingdom where he would rule in righteousness, subduing the wicked nations with an iron rod.

However, the prophets were a bit of a wet blanket on Israel's optimism. They lumped together the prophecies of a future King David and his rule over the nations into the phrase "day of the Lord." This phrase has many variants in Scripture, such as "the Lord's day,"

“day of Christ,” “day of judgment,” “the day,” etc. According to the prophets, before the day of the Lord—when God would judge Israel’s enemies—God would first judge Israel. In Amos chapters 1 and 2, God promised to judge not only Israel’s neighbors, but also Israel.

The prophets did promise forgiveness of sins and a kingdom of righteousness and justice that would be ruled by a Messiah from the line of David, but they also warned that Israel would first undergo a time of judgment. This judgment came when Assyria took the northern kingdom of Israel captive in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:3–6; 18:11–12), and Babylon took the southern kingdom of Judah captive in 587 B.C. (2 Kings 24:1–25:21).

Once they were permitted to return to their land in 539 B.C., the Israelites began to assume that because they had experienced the judgment of God, they must be poised to experience a restoration of their nation and the arrival of the promised Kingdom of God. This would be a time of righteousness and justice ... but it didn’t happen. This would be a time when the nations would flow to Jerusalem ... instead, even the majority of the Israelites did not return to the land. This would be a time when the new King David would assume the throne ... but there wasn’t any king in Israel from the line of David. Instead, Israel was ruled by several other nations over a period of hundreds of years. As such, even after the Israelites were permitted to return to their land, they considered themselves to be in exile. Even in Jesus’ day, the Israelites still believed themselves to be in exile.

Question 4: How do you imagine you would respond if you were an Israelite at this time?

Insight:

Israel despaired and lost all hope. The book of Malachi shows how the Israelites continued to go through the motions of serving and worshipping God, but they didn’t truly believe in Him and His promises. They were carnal and not spiritual with almost no heart attitude of worship and submission. Instead, they only performed the minimum requirements of what they thought God expected from them. They offered defective sacrifices (Mal. 1:8). The priests did not speak truth but showed favoritism in how they instructed the people (Mal. 2:7–9). They divorced their wives and married women who worshipped other gods (Mal. 2:11, 14). They became sorcerers, adulterers, liars, oppressors of the poor, cheats, and inhospitable (Mal. 3:5). And they robbed God by failing to give back to Him their full tithes and offerings (Mal. 3:8–10).

Not every Israelite despaired. Years earlier, the prophet Daniel had asked God to forgive Israel of its sins and to restore the Israelites from exile. God had answered Daniel by telling him that this would not truly happen until 70 sabbatical cycles were complete (**Dan. 9:24–27**). Given that a sabbatical cycle is seven years, Israel’s exile would not be complete for another 430 years. That’s a long time to forget! It’s also a long time to hold onto hope. Nevertheless, believing that God’s promises would eventually be fulfilled, some men endeavored to keep this hope alive by writing under assumed names during the time between the Old and New Testaments. Because of this, we refer to these writings as pseudepigraphal writings, and these authors are known as Apocalyptists because their message was apocalyptic, meaning that they hoped for a dramatic end to the current age that would usher in the golden age of the Messiah.

The Apocalyptists no longer believed that God would act within history to restore things to their proper order. Instead, they expected God to supernaturally intervene, bring things to a dramatic end, and usher in a new age. This is the origin of the phrase found in the New Testament: “this age and the age to come.” This phrase is not found in the Old Testament because it comes from the intertestamental period when the Apocalyptists were writing.

Question 5: The Apocalyptists were looking for the end, and they expected the end to arrive in cataclysmic terms. They believed that if God’s people could just hunker down and hold on long enough, God would come to their rescue and make everything right. Have we as the American church adopted this same mentality? If so, in what ways do we see this?

Insight:

In this apocalyptic thinking, the world consists of two ages: this age and the age to come. The Israelites believed the present age to be Satan’s age because the wicked thrive, and the righteous are oppressed. People are sick; demon possessed; and idolatrous, rebelling against God’s commands, but there is coming a time when Satan’s age will be conquered by God’s rule. This is God’s age, and it is known as the Kingdom of God.

By the time we get to the New Testament, there is a fervent anticipation that the Messiah will soon arrive. This was partly because it had been about 430 years since the prophecy in **Daniel 9:24–27**. It is within this context that the New Testament begins by highlighting the

ministry of John the Baptist and his apocalyptic message of urgent repentance because of impending judgment.

Question 6: What are some examples in **Matthew 3:10–12** of the apocalyptic language that John used?

Insight:

John used strong language that portrayed God as a righteous judge whose judgment was imminent and absolute. God was preparing to establish His Kingdom, but only the righteous would participate in it. As such, John's message was one of repentance (**Matt. 3:2; Acts 19:4**). Those who identified with John's message were baptized by John as a symbol of their acceptance and allegiance to the message, and it is within this context that Jesus came to John to be baptized.

Question 7: Why was Jesus baptized by John? Why did Jesus tell John that it was fitting that He be baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness?

Insight:

God supernaturally revealed Jesus to be His Son. John recognized something in Jesus, saying that Jesus should baptize Him (**Matt. 3:13–17**). This event occurred before Jesus' ministry, so John wasn't responding to reports that he had heard about Jesus. Rather, this was likely the Holy Spirit within John telling him that Jesus was sinless. Furthermore, the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove, and a voice called out from heaven saying that Jesus was God's beloved Son. Clearly Jesus must be the awaited Messiah who would accomplish what John had been preaching!

Despite this supernatural encounter, and despite eagerly awaiting and searching for the Kingdom of God, John nearly missed what God was doing in setting up His Kingdom (**Luke 7:18–19**). Therefore, John began to question whether Jesus was truly the promised Messiah.

Question 8: After John's experience, why would he be uncertain whether Jesus was truly the Messiah?

Insight:

Jesus wasn't acting like the Messiah was supposed to act ... at least in John's mind. And yet Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. These were the very things that the Messiah was expected to do when ushering in the Age to Come. These acts showed God's sovereignty over Satan, and they demonstrated a reversal of Satan's order, but how could Jesus do the one and not the other? How could Jesus usher in the Kingdom of God and not bring a cataclysmic judgment upon the wicked with the goal of restoring the nation of Israel? This was a revolutionary view of God's Kingdom! It didn't match the nature of God's Kingdom in John's mind, and he began to question whether Jesus could truly be the Messiah.

Question 9: Did Jesus answer John's question in **Luke 7:20–23**? How so?

Insight:

Even if Jesus wasn't acting like a king or a judge who crushed Israel's enemies, He was still reversing the evil of this age in fulfillment of prophecy; therefore, He must be the Messiah. Regardless of what John expected the Messiah to look like, and regardless of how John expected the Messiah to act, Jesus must be the Messiah. John was so focused on how the Kingdom of God would arrive and what it would look like when it finally did arrive that he nearly missed it when it came. And like John the Baptist, who was so fixated on the manner of Jesus' first coming that he nearly missed the arrival of the Kingdom, it may be that we too have become so fixated on the manner of Jesus' second coming that we've missed that the Kingdom has already arrived.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the Kingdom of God is crucial in understanding Jesus' ministry and His ministry for us today. In this lesson we have discovered:

- Jesus' central message was that the Kingdom of God has arrived, and only the righteous belong to the Kingdom.
- The focus of the gospel message is the arrival of the Kingdom of God.
- Because of national judgment, exile, a lackluster return of the Israelites from exile, and foreign rule over Israel by many nations, the Israelites became hopeless while waiting for their Messianic king.
- Because of an apocalyptic mindset and a misunderstanding of how God would transition civilization from this age that is governed by Satan to the age to come that will be governed by God, the Israelites were not expecting their Messiah to appear in the way that Jesus did. Rather than a dramatic arrival, accompanied by a cataclysmic shift, Jesus came as an unsuspecting King, planting His Kingdom in such a subtle way that anyone could miss it.
- Even John the Baptist nearly missed the long-awaited Messiah because of the cultural expectations of how the King and His Kingdom would arrive.

As we will see more clearly in subsequent lessons, at the very heart of how the Kingdom arrived is the idea that Jesus wants His people to continue the insurgence He began. Over the course of this study, we will unpack the idea of the Kingdom of God—what it is, and what it means for us today. The Kingdom of God is revolutionary, and its implications for us today are radical.

Suggested Prayer Points:

- As we begin this foundational study on the Kingdom of God, ask God to help us understand His Kingdom and its implications.
- Because of their expectations, many Jews missed the arrival of God's Kingdom. Even John the Baptist entertained doubts about Jesus' identity and the arrival of the Kingdom. Ask God if there are any spiritual truths that we may have missed because of mistaken expectations.
- The Kingdom of God was central to Jesus' gospel message. Ask God to reveal ways in which we might better emphasize the Kingdom in our presentation of the gospel. Ask God to reveal how similar the gospel message we proclaim is to the gospel message that Jesus preached.

Insight Answers for Questions
(The Gospel of the Kingdom)

Question 1:

- **Answer:** The Kingdom of God has arrived in fulfillment of the prophecies and promises of God.
- **Answer:** Repent because only the righteous can enter God's Kingdom.
- **Answer:** Sometimes Jesus' Kingdom announcement was accompanied with supernatural ministry, an essential feature of His new Kingdom.

Question 2:

- **Answer:** The gospel is the good news that the Kingdom of God has arrived in fulfillment of the prophecies.

Question 3:

- **Answer:** The phrase "at hand" conveys the idea that something is so close that one could reach out and touch it. Either it has already arrived, or it is truly imminent.
- **Answer:** An example of the phrase "at hand" occurs in **Matthew 26:45-49**. Here, Jesus' betrayal was imminent in that it was moments away, the process having already begun. This is not a phrase that allots long periods of delay.

Question 4:

- **Answer:** You might become angry and bitter at God for delaying the fulfillment of His promises—or possibly failing to fulfill His promises altogether.
- **Answer:** You might become skeptical about whether God truly can be trusted ... or whether He even exists.
- **Answer:** You might become depressed and despair.
- **Answer:** You might give up on the hope of future blessings and righteousness, choosing instead to get as much pleasure and satisfaction out of life as possible through whatever means necessary.

Question 5:

- **Answer:** Sometimes. The progress of society often furthers a culture of immorality, violence, and hedonism. The response of many Christians has been to seek safety within the walls of their church building. As such, the church becomes a living time capsule that refuses to develop and adjust its methods or applications with the changing culture. Instead, the church becomes increasingly disconnected from society and irrelevant as it awaits its salvation.
- **Answer:** Sometimes. God will judge society for its sins, but much of the church believes that it will escape the effects of any difficulty by being raptured away before that moment. In the meantime, the church simply must hold its ground and not become corrupted by the surrounding culture.
- **Answer:** Sometimes. Our culture and society continue to deteriorate. Rather than involving itself in the things of this life, many Christians have given up on society, choosing instead to wait for the Lord to return and fix everything for us.

Question 6:

- **Answer:** The ax is already in God's hand.

- **Answer:** The unfruitful trees will be burned with fire.
- **Answer:** God's winnowing fork is in His hand.
- **Answer:** God will burn the chaff.
- **Answer:** There will be a baptism of fire.

Question 7:

- **Answer:** John's baptism was not for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was sinless and would have no need for such a baptism. Rather, John's baptism focused on the righteousness of God and the people's need to join God in His righteousness.
- **Answer:** In being baptized, Jesus was identifying with John's message. As we will see, Jesus was not baptized because He believed John that God was about to execute a climactic judgment upon humanity. Instead, Jesus identified with John's message that the Kingdom of God is near, and only the righteous will enter into it.

Question 8:

- **Answer:** There had been zealots before Jesus in whom many Israelites had placed their hope; however, these zealots had all failed to restore Israel. Possibly, John was concerned that he might be setting himself up for disappointment.
- **Answer:** Jesus wasn't what John had expected.
 - Along with a dramatic end of the age, John believed that Jesus would make Israel prosperous again.
 - In **Luke 6:20–21**, Jesus extolled the virtues of being poor and hungry.
 - John expected Jesus to bring hope and joy to God's people.
 - In **Luke 6:21–22**, Jesus extolled the virtues of weeping and of being persecuted.
 - John expected a king who would crush His enemies.
 - In **Luke 6:27–31**, Jesus taught that God's people should show love and compassion to their enemies.
 - John expected a righteous judge who would punish the wicked.
 - In **Luke 6:37**, Jesus didn't sound like a judge.
 - Jesus wasn't apocalyptic.
 - Jesus didn't bring the dramatic judgment that John was anticipating.
 - In fact, there wasn't anything dramatic and imminently cataclysmic about Jesus' message.
 - Also, Jesus did not proclaim the second half of the Apocalyptists' message—that is, after the dramatic conclusion to the end of the age, they believed the nation of Israel was to return to its former glory ... and even greater glory.

Question 9:

- **Answer:** Yes—even though Jesus didn't respond to John's question with a "yes" or "no."
- **Answer:** Instead of telling John that He was the Messiah, Jesus reminded John of what the Messiah would accomplish. Having done these very things in the sight of John's disciples, He then told them to tell John what they had seen and heard.

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

LESSON 2

INTRODUCTION

We have begun a study of the gospel, but we are defining the gospel a little differently than how we usually think of it. The gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God. We might paraphrase Jesus' gospel message in **Mark 1:14-15** as saying, "The good news—the gospel—is that the Kingdom of God, for which we have been hoping, has come to us. The prophecies have been fulfilled. Repent, because only the righteous will enter into it!"

Question 1: Does this rendering of Jesus' gospel message change your thinking or understanding of the gospel? If so, in what ways?

Last time, we discovered that Jesus' central message focused on the Kingdom of God:

- Whenever the gospel writers summarized Jesus' ministry, they did so in terms of the Kingdom of God. They summed up Jesus' message as a proclamation of the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15**).
- Jesus described His mission by saying that He must preach the Kingdom of God (**Luke 4:43**).
- Time and again, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 8:1**).
- Jesus' most famous sermon—the Sermon on the Mount—began with an invitation to enter God's Kingdom (**Matt. 5:3**).
- Many of Jesus' parables centered around the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 13:1-50; 18:21-35; 20:1-16; 21:28-22:14; 25:1-30; Mark 4:26-29**).
- When Jesus sent out the 12 and the 72 disciples, He only told them to say one thing— "The Kingdom of God is at hand" (**Matt. 10:5-7; Luke 10:1, 9**).
- When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He included prayer for His Father's Kingdom to be established on Earth (**Matt. 6:9-10**).
- After Jesus rose from the dead, He preached the Kingdom of God (**Acts 1:3**).

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He commissioned His followers to teach others the message of the Kingdom of God that Jesus had been preaching (**Matt. 28:18-20**). Therefore, if we want to be gospel-centric Christians, then we must be focused on the Kingdom of God. But this begins with our ability to define what is the Kingdom of God. Pastor and author John Ortberg has said, "Jesus' one gospel was the gospel of the availability of the Kingdom. His one purpose was to model—to manifest—the reality of that Kingdom in His life, in His words, in His death and His resurrection. His one command was to pursue the Kingdom—seek first the Kingdom of God. His one plan was for His people to extend the Kingdom—the end of the book of Acts, boldly without hindrance, Paul proclaims the Kingdom of God. And yet millions of people who name the name of Jesus could not tell you what the Kingdom is."

With this in mind, let's ask the question, "What is the Kingdom of God?"

LESSON

Question 2: The Gospels of Mark and Luke speak often of the Kingdom of God, but in Matthew, the overwhelming number of references are to the Kingdom of Heaven. In light of this, do the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven refer to the same thing?

Question 3: How would you define the Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven?

- **Answer:** In the last lesson, we learned that the Israelites understood the Kingdom of God to refer to the time of the end when God's Messiah would arrive and put an end to this current age that is ruled by Satan, ushering in the age of God. This will be an unending Kingdom of justice and righteousness ruled by God.

Insight:

"Kingdom" is a translation of the Greek word *basileia*, whose Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents are *malkuth* and *malkutha*. These words mean much more than their English counterparts "kingdom," "government," or "empire." They also convey the idea of "kingship," "reign," and "sovereignty." Thus, the Kingdom of God refers to the rule and reign of God over His creation.

Question 4: What do **2 Kings 19:15**; **Psalms 29:10, 103:19**; and **Daniel 4:3** teach us about the Kingdom of God?

Insight:

According to **Psalms 47:7–9**; **99:1–4**; **Proverbs 21:1**; **Isaiah 6:1–5**; and **Romans 13:1**, no nation or government leader is beyond God's sovereign authority. Leaders may choose not to submit to God's authority, but their authority does not supersede God's authority. At all times, God has both the right and the power to intervene.

Question 5: How can God be sovereign over kings and kingdoms who are in rebellion to Him?

Insight:

We know that while all of creation is under God's authority, not all of creation submits itself to God. Both angels and humans have rebelled against God. In His sovereignty, God has permitted a season in which his creation may choose to rebel against His commands with seeming impunity, but there is coming a day when all of creation will subject itself to both the authority and the will of God. This is the common meaning of the Kingdom of God in Scripture. In its fullest sense, the Kingdom of God refers to a time when all of creation will choose to submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God.

Therefore, **in a broad sense, the Kingdom of God refers to the sovereignty of God over all of creation, but as a technical term, the Kingdom of God refers to a time when all of creation will choose to submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God.** This is why the Bible refers to God as both a present King and a future King. While God *is presently* the King, He must also *become* the King. In other words, there is a sense in which God must further manifest His kingship in the world of human beings and nations.

God will accomplish this through Jesus Christ, His Messiah (1 Cor. 15:20–28). Numerous Old Testament prophecies look ahead to a coming Messiah who will establish an eternal Kingdom (Isa. 9:6–7; Jer. 23:5–6; Zech. 9:9–10; 14:9). This Kingdom will be a time of prosperity, righteousness, and justice (Psa. 72:1–19). As such, the concepts of a coming king who would wrest control of the nations from Satan—subduing them with an iron rod of righteousness and justice—and an everlasting time of prosperity, peace, and joy are all included in the phrase “Kingdom of God.”

The Israelites believed that the arrival of the Kingdom of God would occur in a moment, on a specific day—referred to as the “day of the Lord.” This would be an apocalyptic event, being a time of judgment when God conquered His enemies.

Question 6: According to Daniel 7:13–14, who will rule the Kingdom of God?

Insight:

God the Father, who is called the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:13, will give Jesus His Kingdom and authority. However, Jesus will not rule alone.

Question 7: According to Daniel 7:27, who will rule with Jesus in the Kingdom of God?

Insight:

Having received authority to rule over the nations from God the Father, Jesus will then give authority to rule over the nations to His faithful disciples (Rev. 2:25–27). The Kingdom of God is not only about the exaltation of Jesus to His rightful place as King; it is also about our glorification as rulers with Jesus in His Kingdom!

Consistent with the teaching in [Daniel chapter 7](#), [Revelation 2:25–27](#) is an allusion to [Psalm 2:8–9](#) which says that Jesus will receive authority to rule over the nations from God the Father. Moreover, it says that He will rule with an iron rod, and that He will break the nations into pieces like a clay pot shatters when struck by an iron rod. In using this same language in [Revelation chapter 2](#), Jesus promises that His faithful followers will co-rule with Him in the Kingdom of God, exercising all His authority as His representatives.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we have discovered:

- In a broad sense, the Kingdom of God refers to the rule and reign of God over His creation.
- As a technical term, the Kingdom of God refers to a time when all of creation will choose to submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God.
- Individuals may choose not to submit to God's authority, but God's position as the final authority over creation (our Sovereign) has not changed.
- According to [Daniel 7:13–14](#), Jesus, being the Son of Man, will receive the Kingdom of God from His Father and will rule and reign over all creation.
- God's faithful servants in this age will rule and reign with King Jesus over all creation in the age to come.

The Kingdom of God refers to God's *authority* and right to rule, as well as to the *realm* in which God exercises His authority. At the very heart of the gospel is the Kingdom of God. It anticipates a time when all of creation will submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God. Furthermore, in the Kingdom, the faithful people of God will rule and reign alongside Jesus with His full authority, and Jesus will serve as King of Kings and Lord of Lords ([1 Tim. 6:13–16](#); [Rev. 17:14](#); [19:11–16](#)). But to what extent is the Kingdom of God present today? This will be the topic of our next lesson.

Suggested Prayer Points:

- Take time to worship the one true God as the sovereign and rightful King over all of creation in general, and over our lives specifically.
- In the future, everyone will bend their knee to Jesus Christ, but as Christians who have already acknowledged God's rightful rule over our lives, it is vital that we take this step now. Take time to surrender every aspect of our lives to Jesus Christ.
- Ask God to instill in our hearts a longing to see God's Kingdom of righteousness supplant the Kingdom of Darkness.

Insight Answers for Questions
(What Is the Kingdom of God?)

Question 2:

- **Answer:** Yes. To protect themselves from breaking God's command against using His name in vain, the Israelites often substituted the name of God. "Kingdom of Heaven" is simply a way of expressing the same thing without using the name of God. **Note:** Matthew does use the phrase Kingdom of God five times (Matt. 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). He did not refuse to use the phrase for fear of offending the Jews. Instead, it appears as though he simply avoided using the phrase excessively so as not to place an unnecessary stumbling block before his target audience, the Jews.
- **Answer:** The phrase "Kingdom of God" occurs 68 times in 10 New Testament books, while the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" occurs 32 times, and only in the Gospel of Matthew. Given that Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience for the purpose of emphasizing how Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies, it is not surprising that Matthew would follow the Jewish tradition of substituting the name of God with "heaven." Nevertheless, Matthew did use the phrase "Kingdom of God" five times to ensure clarity for his readers.
- **Answer:** Parallel accounts within the Gospels use the phrases "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" interchangeably: Matt. 11:11–12/Luke 7:28; Matt. 13:11/Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10; Matt. 13:24/Mark 4:26; Matt. 13:31/Mark 4:30 and Luke 13:18; Matt. 13:33/Luke 13:20; Matt. 18:3/Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16; Matt. 22:2/Luke 13:29.

Question 3:

- **Answer:** In the last lesson, we learned that the Israelites understood the Kingdom of God to refer to the time of the end when God's Messiah would arrive and put an end to this current age that is ruled by Satan, ushering in the age of God. This will be an unending Kingdom of justice and righteousness ruled by God.

Question 4:

- **Answer:** In a broad sense, the Kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all the universe (Psa. 103:19; Dan. 4:3).
- **Answer:** As the Creator, God is King over all the earth (2 Kings 19:15; Psa. 29:10).

Question 5:

- **Answer:** For God to be sovereign, He simply must be the final authority. If God determines that something should be otherwise, He can make it so. He has both the authority and the power to compel His creation to conform to His will. The fact that God does not exercise His authority to force someone to comply with His desire does not make God any less sovereign. It simply means that God is using His sovereign authority to allow actions and decisions that do not please Him.
- **Answer:** A God who is unable to allow His creation to defy His will is not truly all-powerful.
- **Answer:** A God who is unable to permit actions that defy His will and desires while remaining in absolute control—able to intervene at any moment—would have less freedom than His own creation. After all, many human parents permit their children to defy their will and desires without losing their authority over the child or their ability to intervene at any moment to force their will upon the child.

Question 6:

- **Answer:** Jesus will rule as King in the Kingdom of God. Here He is referred to as “one like the son of man.” This was Jesus’ favorite title for Himself. Every time He referred to Himself in the Gospels as the Son of Man, He heralded the arrival of the King whom Daniel prophesied. Examples from the book of Matthew include: 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27–28; 17:9, 12, 22; 18:11; 19:28; 20:18, 28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45, 64.
- **Answer:** In **Luke 7:19–35**, Jesus answered John’s question about whether He was the Messiah whom the Israelites were expecting to usher-in and rule the Kingdom of God. In an allusion to **Daniel 7:13–14**, He then declared Himself to be the Son of Man. In contrast to popular teaching, the phrase “Son of Man” likely does not refer to Jesus’ desire to identify Himself with humanity but connects Jesus to **Daniel 7**—revealing Him to be the promised King who will reign over the Kingdom of God.
- **Answer:** In a clear allusion to **Daniel 7:13–14**, when Jesus was on trial in **Matthew 26:63–65**, Jesus answered the High Priest’s question about whether He was the Son of God by declaring Himself to be the Son of Man. The High Priest immediately tore his robes and declared Jesus’ words to be blasphemy because he understood the magnitude of what Jesus had just said.

Question 7:

- **Answer:** The people of God will rule with Jesus in the Kingdom of God. This is reaffirmed in the book of Revelation: 2:25–27; 3:21; 5:9–10; and 20:4. The book of Revelation opens with the same imagery as that found in **Daniel 7:13–14** (**Rev. 1:11–16**).

ARRIVAL OF THE KINGDOM

LESSON 3

INTRODUCTION

We have begun a study of the gospel, but we are defining the gospel a little differently than how we usually think of it. The gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God. We might paraphrase Jesus' gospel message in **Mark 1:14–15** as saying, “The good news—the gospel—is that the Kingdom of God, for which we have been hoping, has come to us. The prophecies have been fulfilled. Repent, because only the righteous will enter into it!”

We've discovered that Jesus' central message focused on the Kingdom of God:

- Whenever the gospel writers summarized Jesus' ministry, they did so in terms of the Kingdom of God. They summed up Jesus' message as a proclamation of the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14–15**).
- Jesus described His mission by saying that He must preach the Kingdom of God (**Luke 4:43**).
- Time and again, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 8:1**).
- Many of Jesus' parables centered around the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 13:1–50; 18:21–35; 20:1–16; 21:28–22:14; 25:1–30; Mark 4:26–29**).
- When Jesus sent out the 12 and the 72 disciples, He only told them to say one thing— “The Kingdom of God is at hand” (**Matt. 10:5–7; Luke 10:1, 9**).
- After Jesus rose from the dead, He preached the Kingdom of God (**Acts 1:3**).

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He commissioned His followers to teach others the message of the Kingdom of God that He had been preaching (**Matt. 28:18–20**). Therefore, if we want to be gospel-centric Christians, then we must be focused on the Kingdom of God. With this in mind, we asked the question, “What is the Kingdom of God?”

We discovered that, in a broad sense, the Kingdom of God refers to the rule and reign of God over all of creation. Of course, we know that while all of creation may be underneath God's authority, not all of creation presently submits itself to God's will. Therefore, **in the Bible, the phrase “Kingdom of God” usually anticipates a specific time when all of creation will submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God.** Furthermore, in the Kingdom, the faithful people of God will rule and reign alongside Jesus, exercising His full authority, and Jesus will serve as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (**1 Tim. 6:13–16; Rev. 17:14; 19:11–16**).

The Israelites who hoped for the Kingdom of God believed that this would occur in a moment, on a specific day referred to as the “day of the Lord.” This would be an apocalyptic event that uprooted societies. It would be a time of judgment when God finally conquered His enemies. And yet, we've already discovered that the Israelites were somewhat mistaken in their expectations. In fact, John the Baptist nearly missed what God was doing in setting up His Kingdom because he had become so fixated on how the Kingdom would come and what it must look like.

According to Jesus, the Kingdom of God does not come in a dramatic way. He compares the arrival of the Kingdom to seed that grows quietly (**Mark 4:26–29**), to a miniscule mustard seed that grows into a mighty tree (**Mark 4:30–32**), and to a small bit of yeast hidden within a large amount of flour (**Matt. 13:33**). These parables suggest that the Kingdom becomes a reality among us *before* it comes in a powerful and dramatic way.

LESSON

Question 1: According to **Matthew 11:11–12**; **21:31–32**; and **Luke 16:16**, has the Kingdom of God already arrived? Explain.

Insight:

Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God as a present reality. **Matthew 4:17**; **10:7** and **Mark 1:14–15**, convey a similar understanding by declaring the Kingdom to be at hand. The phrase “at hand” conveys the idea that something is so close that one could reach out and touch it. Either it has already arrived, or it is truly imminent.

An example of the phrase “at hand” occurs in **Matthew 26:45–49**. Here, Jesus’ betrayal was imminent in that it was moments away, the process having already begun. This is not a phrase that allots for long periods of delay. The phrase cannot refer to a period of 2,000+ years between Jesus’ first and second advents. Instead, Jesus taught that the arrival of the Kingdom of God had already begun in His day.

Question 2: According to **Matthew 12:27–29**, has the Kingdom of God already arrived? Explain.

Insight:

The Kingdom of God is a present reality. It is already functioning because the King has arrived, and where the King is, there also is the Kingdom of God. Jesus declared in [Matthew 12:28](#) that the Kingdom of God has already come upon man, and the proof is in the fact that demonized people were finding freedom. For Jesus to enter Satan's domain (the strongman's house) and plunder his goods (free his captives by casting out demons), Jesus must first have bound Satan (the strongman). Satan still exerts some influence, but as King, Jesus has bound Him, limiting his influence. [Matthew 12:27](#) teaches that Satan has been partially restrained. This is because Jesus has overcome Satan's world ([John 16:33](#)) and has judged—or condemned—Satan ([John 16:11](#)).

Question 3: Jesus—the King—ascended to heaven. Should we assume then that today the Kingdom of God is no longer present on Earth among men?

Insight:

Jesus Christ dwells within His people today. Just as the Kingdom was present in the ministry of Jesus, it is present in the ministry of His church. The King is still among us, and His spiritual power is active within us, even though the Kingdom of God is not yet here in its fullness.

Question 4: If the Kingdom of God has already arrived, and if the Kingdom of God refers to a time when all of creation will submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God, then why does sin and rebellion to God's commandments remain?

Insight:

The “already, and not yet” element of the Kingdom of God is exemplified in **Hebrews 2:6–9**. Jesus is currently crowned with glory and honor, and the Father has subjected all things to Him. Jesus is presently the King, and yet not everything currently subjects itself to His kingship. Likewise, **Philippians 2:9–11** teaches that God has already exalted Jesus above all things, but the day is still future when all things will submit themselves to Jesus’ authority. In fact, **1 Corinthians 15:23–28** teaches that part of Christ’s rule over the Kingdom of God at this time is the conquering and subduing of His enemies. God the Father has exalted Jesus and granted Him authority over all things, but Jesus must subdue them as a part of His reign. Therefore, there necessarily remains a period of time in which Jesus serves as King over the Kingdom of God while not all of creation recognizes His kingship.

Question 5: What are some other examples in the Bible in which there is an “already, and not yet” understanding?

Question 6: In what way can we see the “already, and not yet” nature of the Kingdom of God in **Daniel 2:31–45**?

Insight:

Often, **Daniel 2:31–45** is interpreted by students of prophecy as representing the global kingdoms (kingdoms that controlled the known world) from the time of Babylon through the end of this age. As such, the feet of iron mingled with clay is commonly believed to be the kingdom of the Antichrist which is a continuation—or a revival of—the Roman Empire.

Another interpretation of this passage views the statue in **Daniel chapter 2** as representing the global kingdoms from the time of Babylon until the arrival of the Kingdom of God. In this view, the statue in **Daniel chapter 2** pictures the global kingdoms leading to Jesus' first advent; whereas, the beasts in **Daniel chapter 7** depict the global kingdoms leading to Jesus' second advent.

In either interpretation, the Kingdom of God arrives during the time of the Roman Empire. According to Daniel's interpretation of the dream in **Daniel 2:36–45**, Babylon was the head of gold. History informs us that Media-Persia conquered Babylon and proved to be the chest and arms of silver. Likewise, Greece was the belly and thighs of brass, and Rome was the legs of iron as well as the feet of iron mingled with clay. The little stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is the Kingdom of God. According to the dream, the little stone fell upon the toes of the statue—upon Rome.

The little stone then grew to become a mountain that crushed all the other kingdoms. In other words, Jesus' arrival during the days of Rome inaugurated the Kingdom of God. However, the Kingdom did not come in great glory, conquering the kingdoms of the earth. Instead, the Kingdom of God arrived in humility—small like a little stone or a mustard seed—and it grew into something great—like a mountain, or a great tree.

According to this prophetic dream, the Kingdom of God will be a reality *before* it comes in a powerful and dramatic way. There is an inauguration of the Kingdom that is executed in humility, and there is a consummation of the Kingdom that is executed in power and glory (**Rev. 19:11–16**).

CONCLUSION

The Kingdom of God has already arrived. It is present and functioning on Earth today. Jesus taught the Israelites that they did not need to wait for a conquering Messiah in order to participate in the Kingdom. Likewise, we also do not need to wait for a conquering

Messiah before we can participate in the Kingdom of God. We do not need to wait for death, the rapture, or the Second Coming of Jesus to participate in the Kingdom of God. We are already participating in God's Kingdom *today*. Jesus is already ruling, and we should be living His way now.

Suggested Prayer Points:

- Ask God to teach us the significance of our being a present member of His Kingdom.
- Just as the Kingdom was present in the ministry of Jesus, it is present in the ministry of the church. Ask God to embolden us to minister with the same power as Jesus as we follow His example of expelling the powers of darkness and inviting people to join God's Kingdom.
- Jesus planted His Kingdom during His first coming, and He has enlisted us to fight the enemy and expand His Kingdom. Pray that we will be vigilant soldiers who faithfully seek to expand the influence of God's Kingdom.

Insight Answers for Questions (Arrival of the Kingdom)

Question 1:

- **Answer:** Yes. Jesus said that in His day, people were trying to force their way into the Kingdom of God that was being proclaimed as having arrived in fulfillment of the prophecies.
- **Answer:** Yes. Present tense verbs are used to speak of the Kingdom's present reality in Jesus' time.
- **Answer:** The present tense verbiage in [Matthew 21:31-32](#) is most clear in the NIV which says the tax collectors and prostitutes "are entering" the Kingdom of God ahead of the chief priests and elders of the people. In context, this has nothing to do with the tax collectors and prostitutes dying earlier than the chief priests and prostitutes. In other words, they are not entering the Kingdom of God by transferring from this life to the next. Rather, they believed John the Baptist's message and repented in faith; therefore, they entered into the Kingdom of God.
- **Answer:** Yes. In [Matthew 11:11-12](#) and [Luke 16:16](#), Jesus indicates that the arrival of the Kingdom coincided with the ministry of John the Baptist.

Question 2:

- **Answer:** Yes. Jesus does not speak of the Kingdom of God using future tense language.
- **Answer:** Yes. According to Jesus, the evidence that the Kingdom of God had arrived lay in the fact that the people were being delivered from demons. Through Jesus and His disciples, the power of God was already invading the domain of evil and expelling the powers of darkness.
- **Answer:** Jesus is stronger than Satan. He was the awaited Messianic King who would reverse the evil of this age and usher in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the King had arrived, and where the King is, there also is the Kingdom.

Question 3:

- **Answer:** No. In [John 14:13-17, 20 and 23](#), Jesus told His disciples that He would live within them. Jesus may have returned to heaven in one sense, but in another sense, He continues to be present on Earth through His people. As such, Jesus continues to exercise His authority through His people ([Matt. 28:18-20](#)).
- **Answer:** What Jesus offered continues today through the people of God. We can also say, "If we cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you and is working here." Not only has God granted his people the authority to cast out demons, but His people are doing even greater works than Jesus did ([John 14:12](#)). The Kingdom of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is continuing to demonstrate its power over the Kingdom of Satan—not just in expelling evil spirits, but in many other activities that undo what the Devil has done.
- **Answer:** [Colossians 1:13-14](#) teaches that, at the moment of salvation, we become members of God's Kingdom. Therefore, the Kingdom of God is on Earth today because believers in Jesus are on Earth today.

Question 4:

- **Answer:** In one sense, the Kingdom of God has already arrived, and in another sense, it is in the process of arriving. Some have referred to the arrival of the Kingdom in

Jesus' first appearing as the inauguration of the Kingdom which is distinct from the consummation of the Kingdom at Jesus' second appearing. Therefore, the Kingdom of God exists as a present reality on Earth in which Jesus has the authority and right to rule and where Jesus is extending the realm in which all things are in subjection to Him, but the Kingdom has not yet reached its full culmination. Prior to the consummation of the Kingdom, there remains a time when not all of creation submits to God's will.

- **Answer:** Some have compared the Kingdom of God coming in two phases with D-Day and V-Day of World War II. Jesus planted His Kingdom during His first coming—and it has been growing ever since. When the Allied troops landed on the beaches of France on D-Day (Deliverance Day), they planted a new flag and continued to expand their territory until the war was over. Just as the Allied troops experienced V-Day (Victory Day) when they invaded Berlin, so phase two of the Kingdom's arrival will take place at Jesus' second coming. However, between D-Day and V-Day much evil exists, and many battles must be fought and won. From Jesus' second coming onward the Kingdom of God will be experienced in its fullness!
- **Answer:** Jesus is King, but His Kingdom is not yet of this world ([John 18:36](#)). Jesus is in the process of subduing His enemies and subjecting the world to His authority ([1 Cor. 15:23–26](#)).

Question 5:

- **Answer:** We are said to be God's children now, and yet, what we will be has not yet appeared ([1 John 3:2](#)).
- **Answer:** In one sense, we are already seated with Jesus in heaven where we rule alongside Him, and yet in another sense, we remain here on the earth being conformed into the image and likeness of Jesus through our suffering. In one sense, we have received the immeasurable riches of God's grace and kindness, and in another sense, we are anticipating receiving these in the coming age ([Eph. 2:4–7](#)).
- **Answer:** In one sense, our sinful natures have already been crucified, and in another sense, we are awaiting the day when we will be truly freed from our sinful natures ([Rom. 6:6](#)).
- **Answer:** In one sense, Jesus has already sanctified us, and in another sense, we are in the process of being sanctified ([Heb. 10:14](#)).

Question 6:

- **Answer:** The Kingdom of God arrives as a little stone resting upon the toes of the statue, but then it grows into a mighty mountain that crushes all the global kingdoms represented in the statue. In this imagery, the Kingdom does not arrive in its final form. Rather, it arrives in one form and culminates in another form.

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM REVEALED

LESSON 4

INTRODUCTION

We've been examining the Kingdom of God which is the rule and reign of God over all creation. The Israelites who hoped for the arrival of the Kingdom believed that this would occur in a moment—on a specific day referred to as the “day of the Lord.” In their mind, this would be an apocalyptic event, a time of judgment, and a time when God conquered His enemies ... but the Israelites misunderstood what God hoped to accomplish.

According to Jesus, the Kingdom of God does not come in a dramatic way. This is illustrated in several ways. Over time, the seed representing the Kingdom of God grows quietly (Mark 4:26–29). Similarly, the Kingdom starts as a small mustard seed that grows into a great tree (Mark 4:30–32). And it is hidden like yeast in a large batch of dough (Matt. 13:33). These parables suggest that the Kingdom becomes a reality *before* it comes in a powerful and dramatic way. Indeed, we concluded in our last study that the Kingdom of God is a reality right now—it is already present and functioning—and we considered several ways that we can know this from the teaching of the Bible. Most notably, Jesus Himself said the Kingdom of God is already here, and the Apostle Paul taught that all believers are already part of God's Kingdom on Earth (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20; Col. 1:13–14).

We also asked the question, “If the Kingdom of God has already arrived, then why does sin and rebellion to God's commands remain?” We answered this by concluding that, in one sense, the Kingdom is already here, and in another sense, it has not yet fully arrived. The Kingdom has been inaugurated, but it has not yet been fully consummated. Instead, the Kingdom arrives virtually unnoticed—like a mustard seed, or a little stone—and it grows into something mighty—like a great tree, or a mountain that crushes the kingdoms of this world (Mark 4:30–32; Dan. 2:34–35).

Like “the already, and not yet” aspect of God's Kingdom, there are several mysteries that surround this topic, and Jesus provides us with the answers to these mysteries through his parables. The sheer quantity of parables in relation to any of Jesus' other teachings reveals how concerned Jesus was that we understand His Kingdom. Therefore, we would benefit from taking the necessary time to see what truths we can learn from Jesus' parables concerning the nature of the Kingdom of God.

LESSON

Question 1: According to Matthew 13:3–23, what does the parable of the soils teach us about the Kingdom of God?

Insight:

According to the parable of the soils found in **Matthew 13:3–23**, only one soil—the fourth soil—produces fruit. The reason for this is irrelevant to our purposes in this study. The point is that most people will reject the Kingdom of God. In this parable, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God has come into the world to be received by some and to be rejected by others. In its present form, the Kingdom will only have partial success, and this success is dependent upon each person’s response to the gospel of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is working quietly among people, using ordinary means. God is not forcing the Kingdom upon people; it must be willingly received. And wherever the word of the Kingdom is received, it brings forth great fruit.

Question 2: According to **Matthew 13:24–30 and 36–43**, what does the parable of the weeds teach us about the Kingdom of God? Why do you think Jesus presented a picture of the Kingdom of God being like wheat and weeds growing together until harvest time?

Insight:

Like the parable of the four soils, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God would arrive and work in a quiet, almost secret, way. The Israelites expected the arrival of the Kingdom to bring about the end of the age and inaugurate the age to come by destroying the unrighteous. As such, they anticipated a massive disruption to human society. How then could the Kingdom of God have arrived, and yet society continued as though nothing had changed?

In this parable, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God had, indeed, arrived even though society continued as normal. Jesus taught that the Kingdom arrives in the midst of the present age rather than at its conclusion, and for a time, the righteous and the unrighteous will continue to live together.

In a sense, the Kingdom is present but hidden in the world; nevertheless, it will grow to fruition when there will be an apocalyptic end to the mixed society, the wicked will be judged, and the righteous will experience everlasting life. In the meantime, the people of God who have entered God's Kingdom must continue to live among the wicked and to persevere through this present evil age.

Question 3: According to **Matthew 13:31–32**, what does the parable of the mustard seed teach us about the Kingdom of God? Why did Jesus compare the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed?

Insight:

At the time that Jesus was teaching, the black mustard seed was the smallest garden-variety seed in Palestine that would have been cultivated. Belonging to a common crop, this illustration would have been quickly grasped among farmers.

Certainly, the Israelites questioned how the Kingdom of God could truly be present in such an insignificant movement as that embodied by Jesus and His followers. They expected the Kingdom of God to be like a great tree under which the nations would find shelter. In contrast, Jesus and his band of disciples could hardly even be called a movement.

Responding to this concern, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God, which one day would indeed be like a great tree, was already present in the world in a tiny, insignificant form. But like the mustard seed, nobody should underestimate what would come from such humble beginnings.

Question 4: According to **Matthew 13:33**, what does the parable of the yeast teach us about the Kingdom of God?

Insight:

Recall that the Israelites expected that the arrival of the Kingdom of God would displace the present evil order of the world and society. It would result in a transformation of the entire world, and yet, Jesus' ministry appeared to initiate no such transformation. Despite Jesus' preaching that the Kingdom of God had arrived, the world continued as it always had.

Even among the Israelites, Jesus and his followers seemed to be engulfed. After three and a half years of ministry, the book of Acts records only 120 followers gathered in Jerusalem during Pentecost. But like yeast, which at first appears to accomplish very little, the Kingdom of God eventually begins to influence and transform the world. According to **Acts 2:41**, when this began, about 3,000 people were added to the Kingdom in a single day.

Question 5: According to **Matthew 13:44-46**, what do the parables of the hidden treasure and of the pearl of great value teach us about the Kingdom of God?

Insight:

These parables teach that the Kingdom of God is priceless. It is superior to all other possessions. Therefore, if it costs a person everything, it remains a bargain. Everything is a small price to pay in return for gaining the Kingdom.

Indeed, Jesus demands everything from His disciples (**Luke 14:26–27; 18:22**). While this may have seemed outrageous to some, present in the person and work of Jesus was the Kingdom of God. Therefore, if becoming a disciple of Jesus cost a person everything, then it was a worthwhile price to pay.

Question 6: According to **Matthew 13:47–50**, what does the parable of the net teach us about the Kingdom of God?

Insight:

Jesus troubled the religious leaders with his affinity for the tax collectors and sinners. Keep in mind that “sinners” was a catch-all phrase denoting those whom the Israelites believed, through habitual sinful behavior, were reprobates. In other words, there could be no salvation for them. How could the Kingdom of God be represented in a man who was rejected by the religious leaders and welcomed by reprobates?

Similar to the parable of the weeds, the parable of the net teaches that the Kingdom begins with a mixture of the righteous and the unrighteous. God’s invitation to participate in the Kingdom is extended to everyone, regardless of their sordid backgrounds and rough edges. It does not discriminate. There are some whom we may not expect that belong to the Kingdom, and there are others who appear to be righteous but are truly lost. It is only at the end of this age that the unrighteous and evil will be removed. It is not our place to judge who truly belongs and who does not. Our job is simply to love all people, to share the message with everyone, and to embrace all who claim to receive the message.

Question 7: Mark's account of Jesus' teachings includes a parable not found in the book of Matthew. According to **Mark 4:26-29**, what does the parable of the growing seed teach us about the Kingdom of God?

Insight:

This parable illustrates the supernatural character of the Kingdom of God. While God does use man to spread the knowledge of His Kingdom, the growth of the Kingdom is accomplished by God. In the parable, the man did not create the seed; neither did he cultivate the seed. Instead, he scattered the seed and then watched as the seed germinated and grew of its own accord. Likewise, other than proclaiming the Good News, the growth of the Kingdom of God is not dependent upon man but upon God. It always remains God's Kingdom and God's work.

CONCLUSION

The Kingdom of God is supernatural. It does not follow Jewish expectations or human logic. Having arrived with humble beginnings, the Kingdom will grow and influence the entire world. While God is not presently forcing His Kingdom upon us, the presence of the Kingdom does require a radical response from us. Either we give up everything to become a disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of the Kingdom, or we stand outside of the Kingdom as enemies of God.

Suggested Prayer Points:

- Like a net, the Kingdom of God does not discriminate. Ask God to protect us from discriminating in whom we seek to invite into the Kingdom. Ask that God will grant us a burden for all people regardless of their sordid backgrounds and rough edges.
- Like a tiny bit of yeast that permeates the whole lump of dough, pray that we will experience a disproportionate effectiveness in seeing God's purposes accomplished.
- Ask God to help us understand the incomparable value of His Kingdom such that we truly will be willing to sacrifice anything and everything for it.

Insight Answers for Questions
(Mysteries of the Kingdom Revealed)

Question 1:

- **Answer:** Of the four soils, only one soil produced fruit. Likewise, the majority of people will reject the Kingdom of God. In its present form, the Kingdom will only have partial success, and this success is dependent upon each person's response to the gospel of the Kingdom.
- **Answer:** Jesus likened the expansion of the Kingdom to something as ordinary and inconspicuous as a farmer sowing seed. The expansion of the Kingdom is not accomplished through an apocalyptic display of irresistible power.

Question 2:

- **Answer:** Jesus taught that the Kingdom arrives in the midst of the present age rather than at its conclusion.
- **Answer:** Jesus taught that the arrival of the Kingdom of God does not uproot society. For a time, society will continue to consist of both the righteous and the unrighteous.

Question 3:

- **Answer:** The average mustard seed is between one and two millimeters in diameter. Likewise, the Kingdom of God's beginning was small and almost imperceptible, having begun with only a handful of people.
- **Answer:** Jesus was emphasizing that the Kingdom of God has humble beginnings. Just as a large mustard tree can have a humble origin, so also a mighty Kingdom can come from humble beginnings. The Kingdom began with Jesus and a small band of disciples. After three and a half years of ministry, the book of Acts records only 120 followers gathered in Jerusalem during Pentecost ([Acts 1:15](#)).
- **Answer:** Jesus was illustrating the abnormal growth of the Kingdom of God among men.

Question 4:

- **Answer:** Jesus likened the Kingdom of God to a small bit of yeast that seemed to be engulfed by the dough. Nevertheless, it eventually permeates the entire batch.
- **Answer:** Just as the miniscule proportion of yeast-to-dough doesn't prevent the yeast from accomplishing its purpose, so also the miniscule proportion of God's people compared to the people of the kingdom of darkness won't prevent the Kingdom from permeating and transforming the entire world.
- **Answer:** At first, when a little bit of yeast is added to a lump of dough, nothing appears to happen, but eventually the entire lump is transformed. The little bit of yeast expands and transforms the entire lump of dough. Likewise, the Kingdom of God at first appears to accomplish very little, but it will eventually expand and transform the entire world.

Question 5:

- **Answer:** It is priceless. The Kingdom of God is worth more than everything one has to offer.

Question 6:

- **Answer:** A net catches anything and everything that gets tangled up in it. It does not discriminate. Some fish may be strange, and others may be bad, but the net seeks to catch all of them. Likewise, the offer of the Kingdom of God extends to everyone. We should not discriminate in whom we seek to invite into the Kingdom.
- **Answer:** Evil will not be removed until the end of the age.

Question 7:

- **Answer:** The man sowed the seed and watched as it grew on its own. The man did not accomplish this growth as he did not even understand how it grew. Likewise, it is not man's efforts but God who will grow the Kingdom.

THE KING AND HIS COVENANT

LESSON 5

INTRODUCTION

We've discovered that Jesus' central message focused on the Kingdom of God. Therefore, if we want to be gospel-centric Christians, then we must be focused on the Kingdom of God. But this begins with our ability to define what is the Kingdom of God. In a broad sense, the Kingdom of God refers to the rule and reign of God over all of creation. Of course, we know that while all of creation may be underneath God's authority, not all of creation presently submits itself to God's will. Therefore, in a more narrow sense, the phrase "Kingdom of God" in the Bible usually anticipates a specific time when all of creation will submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God. Furthermore, in the Kingdom, the faithful people of God will rule and reign alongside Jesus, exercising His full authority, and Jesus will serve as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:13-16; Rev. 17:14; 19:11-16).

Furthermore, we've concluded that the Kingdom of God is a present reality. It is already functioning because Jesus, the King, has arrived, and where the King is, there also is the Kingdom. But there were many in Jesus' day who could not understand how the Kingdom of God could have arrived. With the arrival of the Kingdom, they anticipated an uprooting of society, a shattering of the godless Gentile nations, and the destruction of the wicked; but everything seemed to continue as usual. In response, Jesus offered parables to illustrate the nature of the Kingdom of God.

In the parable of the four soils, Jesus taught that the Kingdom has arrived, but in its present form, it will have only partial success. Of the four soils, only one was fruitful. Likewise, in its present form, most people will reject the Kingdom of God. And in the parable of the weeds, Jesus taught that there is a season in which the righteous and unrighteous must live together. The arrival of the Kingdom did not initiate an apocalyptic destruction of the wicked. Nevertheless, there is coming a day when the wicked will be removed and judged.

Some couldn't understand how the Kingdom could include the tax collectors and sinners and not include the religious leaders. In the parable of the net, Jesus taught that God's invitation goes out to all kinds of people, and everyone who responds is accepted into present discipleship in the Kingdom. They may have sorted backgrounds and rough edges, but the good news of the Kingdom is for everyone. It is not our place to judge who should belong to the Kingdom and who should not. Our job is simply to love all people, to share the message with everyone, and to embrace all who claim to receive the message.

Others couldn't understand how Jesus and His small band of followers could represent the Kingdom of God. They could barely be called a movement, let alone a kingdom. In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus taught that the Kingdom, which one day will be a great tree, is already present in the world in a tiny, insignificant form. Similarly, in the parable of the yeast, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God, which one day will rule over the entire earth, has entered into the world in a form that is hardly perceptible. When a little bit of yeast is put into a large lump of dough, nothing seems to happen at first. The yeast seems

to be quite engulfed by the dough, but eventually something does happen, and the result is the complete transformation of the dough. The Kingdom of God had begun with Jesus and His small band of disciples, and they would eventually transform the world.

But if the Kingdom of God has arrived, then what does it mean for us?

LESSON

Insight:

Established in Jesus' blood, the arrival of the Kingdom began a new relationship between humanity and God. Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant and established a New Covenant (**Jer. 31:31-34; Luke 22:20; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; Heb. 8:6-13**). Today, we are not subject to the Old Testament Law which belonged to the Old Covenant. According to Jesus, the Law and the Prophets were until John the Baptist, but after John comes the Kingdom and the time of the Messiah's salvation (**Matt. 11:11-13, 19**).

Question 1: Jesus used for Himself the title "Son of Man." Given the context of **Matthew 11:11-13 and 19**, what is the significance of this title?

Insight:

The significance of Jesus' allusion to **Daniel 7:13-14** by referring to Himself as the Son of Man would not have been missed by his audience. During Jesus' mock trial in **Matthew 26:63-66**, Jesus was asked whether He was the Christ, the Son of God. In response, Jesus again alluded to **Daniel 7:13-14**, referring to Himself as the Son of Man. This provoked the High Priest into tearing his robes and declaring Jesus' words to be blasphemy because the High Priest understood what Jesus had truly said. This is made clearer in Luke's account (**Luke 22:66-71**). In this account, the religious leaders first responded by making sure they were correct in understanding Jesus' words to mean that He was, indeed, declaring Himself to be the Son of God.

In **Matthew 11:11-13 and 19**, Jesus declared Himself to be God and King, and He also declared the arrival of the Kingdom. According to Jesus, the time of God using mediators, such as the Law and the Prophets, to communicate His expectations for mankind is finished.

Instead, the time of the Kingdom has begun with the arrival of its King, and the King is communicating directly with mankind.

This constituted a massive shift in thinking for the Israelites. How could Jesus declare the Old Testament Law to be complete before the day of judgment? In the Jewish thinking, faithfulness to the Old Testament Law, being the people of God, and participation in the Kingdom of God were inseparable. According to Jewish thinking, man's relationship to God was dependent upon His relationship to the Old Testament Law. Those who followed the Law would participate in the Kingdom, and those who rejected the Law would be excluded.

Question 2: Were Old Testament saints saved by observing the Law? Explain.

Question 3: According to **Galatians 2:16**; **3:21–26**; and **Romans 3:19–24**, what was the purpose of the Law?

Question 4: In contrast to keeping the Law, what did Jesus teach in **Matthew 5:3** regarding who belongs to His Kingdom?

Insight:

In **Galatians 3:21–26**, the Apostle Paul taught that the Law played an important role for a season. It was designed to point people to Jesus and to reveal our need for Him. Being the realization of the Law’s goal, Jesus, therefore, is vastly superior to the Law. In fact, this is the theme of the first three chapters in Hebrews. Hebrews begins with the mind-blowing statement that, in Jesus, God—the creator of all things—has spoken to us directly. Just like Jesus taught in **Matthew 11:11–13 and 19**, God is no longer using the mediators of the Law and the Prophets. Now God is speaking to us directly through His Son (**Heb. 1:1–2**).

Like the Apostle Paul and the author of Hebrews, Jesus viewed the entire Old Testament movement as divinely directed and as having arrived at its goal in Himself. Jesus’ Messianic mission and the presence of the Kingdom are the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Therefore, Jesus assumed an authority equal to that of the Old Testament Law.

Question 5: In **Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28 and 31–32**, Jesus changed portions of the Old Testament Law. By what authority did He make these changes?

Insight:

Jesus' preaching was different from the rabbinic method which relied upon the authority of earlier rabbis. He didn't even follow the prophetic formulation, "Thus says the Lord." Rather than appeal to religious scholars and commentators, and rather than present himself as a messenger relaying a revelation from God, Jesus spoke in his own authority (**Matt. 7:28-29**). Whether teaching or prophesying, Jesus repeatedly grounded His message in His own authority with the words, "I say to you." Examples in the book of Matthew include: 5:18, 20, 22, 26, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 6:2, 5, 16, 25, 29; 8:11; 10:15, 23, 42; 11:11, 22, 24; 12:6, 31, 17; 16:18, 28; 17:12, 20; 18:3, 10, 13, 18-19, 22; 19:9, 23-24, 28; 21:21, 31, 43; 23:36, 39; 24:2, 34, 47; 26:13, 21, 29, 34.

On the authority of His own word, Jesus rejected the scribal interpretations of the Law which were considered part of the Law itself. This included the scribal teachings regarding such things as the Sabbath (**Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-21; 14:1-24**), fasting (**Mark 2:18-22**), ceremonial purity and washings (**Matt. 15:1-30; Mark 7:1-23; Luke 11:37-54**), and distinctions between the righteous and sinners (**Mark 2:15-17; Luke 15:1-32**).

Furthermore, Jesus reinterpreted the role of the Law in the new era of the Messianic salvation.

Question 6: In what ways did Jesus' teaching in **Mark 7:14-19** reinterpret the Old Testament Law?

Insight:

According to Jesus, righteousness in the Kingdom of God is no longer mediated by the Law but by a new redemptive act of God. A person must be purified from within, not from without. As was foreseen by the Prophets, God's laws must be written upon the heart (**Eze. 11:19-21; 36:26-27**).

Not only did Jesus reinterpret the role of the Law in **Mark 7:14-19**, He also declared, in principle, all food to be clean by stating that a person cannot be defiled by food. Moreover, Jesus annulled the entire tradition of ceremonial purity and washings because a person is not made unclean by touching or consuming things outside of the body. Thus, in the space of a few sentences, and on His authority alone, Jesus cancelled the majority of the Old

Testament Law. Jesus could do this because He was not only the fulfillment of the Law, He was also King, and the King has the authority to rewrite laws.

Jesus has fulfilled and replaced the Old Testament Law that proved to be a yoke too great for anyone to bear (**Matt. 11:27–30; Acts 15:1–11; Heb. 7:12**). The requirements of the Law could never be met because it was beyond human ability to resist our sinful nature. However, Jesus offers us a new nature (**John 3:3–6; 2 Cor. 5:17**). Jesus' yoke is easy because His expectations are aligned with our new nature.

Question 7: With a change of law comes a change in the standard by which a person is judged. Why do you think **Matthew 12:35–37**, teaches that this new standard for judgment will be our careless words rather than our conduct?

Insight:

We will not be judged by our adherence to the Law but by the degree to which our character matches the character of God. God never intended the people to interpret the Old Testament Law apart from a change of heart, and Jesus brings clarity to this in His demand for righteous character. His goal is that our character be conformed to match His own character. When this occurs, our conduct will also be righteous (**Matt. 7:16–17**). Thus, Jesus has re-written the Law to focus on one's character which originates in one's beliefs rather than one's conduct.

CONCLUSION

With the arrival of the Kingdom comes a new relationship between humanity and God. The King has declared the Old Covenant to be fulfilled and has established a New Covenant. As such, God no longer uses mediators to communicate His expectations for us. Now He communicates directly to people. Moreover, we are no longer subject to the Old Testament Law. Now we have God's law written upon our hearts and have been granted a new nature that is inclined to seek after God. Jesus' revolutionary teaching on the Kingdom includes that we will be judged by our character rather than by our conduct, which requires that we be transformed in heart and mind, not just in practice.

Suggested Prayer Points:

- In contrast to the Jewish religious leaders, worship Jesus as the Son of Man who was prophesied in the book of Daniel to be the King over God's Kingdom. Thank the Father for sending His Son—the King—to speak to us directly rather than continue to use mediators.

Many Jews failed to recognize that Jesus is superior to the Law. Pray that we would not become so fixated on legalistic regulations that we miss Jesus and the relationship that He offers.

- We will be judged by our character rather than our conduct. Pray that through the empowering of the Holy Spirit who has written God's laws upon our hearts, our character will be transformed to match Jesus' character.

Insight Answers for Questions
(The King and His Covenant)

Question 1:

- **Answer:** The Son of Man is an allusion to **Daniel 7:13–14** where God judges the nations of the earth and establishes His eternal Kingdom. The Son of Man is both God and King over the Kingdom. By referring to Himself as the Son of Man in **Matthew 11**, Jesus declared Himself to be God and King, and He also announced the arrival of the Kingdom.

Question 2:

- **Answer:** No. Salvation has always been dependent upon faith (**Gal. 3:10–11**).
- **Answer:** In the Old Testament, man demonstrated his faith and reliance upon God by following God's commands as expressed through the Prophets and in the Law. Failure to obey God's commands demonstrated a lack of faith and trust in God, as well as a rejection of Him.

Question 3:

- **Answer:** The Law revealed that man is incapable of meeting God's standard. It revealed man's need for a Savior, who is Jesus Christ (**Gal. 3:21–26**).
- **Answer:** The Law was merely a means to an end. It was not the end in itself. Unfortunately, many Israelites made the mistake of viewing the Law as the conclusion, but no person has ever been saved by adhering to the Law. Instead, the Law was designed to direct people to Jesus Christ (**Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:19–24**).

Question 4:

- **Answer:** Only those who understand their spiritual bankruptcy before a holy God will enter the Kingdom of God.
- **Answer:** Only those who understand that they don't measure up to God's standards will enter the Kingdom of God.
- **Answer:** Brokenness over one's own sin is the only way to become a citizen of God's Kingdom (**Luke 18:9–14**).

Question 5:

- **Answer:** Jesus made these changes in His own authority. He substituted statements from the Old Testament Law with His own teaching, saying, "You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you ...". In doing so, Jesus presented Himself as a higher authority than the Old Testament Law which had been dictated by God. In other words, Jesus presented Himself as being both superior to the Law and equal to God the Father in authority.

Question 6:

- **Answer:** The Law declared a person to be unclean based upon what that person ate or touched. Defilement was based upon external influences upon a person. In contrast, Jesus taught that external influences cannot make a person unclean because they have no means of penetrating the individual's heart. Rather, defilement is based upon actions that stem from within a person's heart.

Question 7:

- **Answer:** The words that we speak when we are not on guard reveal our true character because character can be defined as our behavior when we believe nobody can see us. Conduct is merely a manifestation of character (**Matt. 7:16–17**). Our actions are motivated by the thoughts, feelings, and desires of our inner person. Therefore, the Law focused on conduct, but Jesus focused on the heart—He focused on a person’s character. This new standard targets the root cause behind all conduct. According to Jesus, condemnation will rest not upon how well someone can follow the rules, but upon conduct that evidences the true nature of one’s inner being.

KINGDOM PARTICIPATION

LESSON 6

INTRODUCTION

We have been studying the gospel which is the good news of the Kingdom of God. We have paraphrased Jesus' gospel message in **Mark 1:14–15** to say, “The good news—the gospel—is that the Kingdom of God, for which we have been hoping, has come to us. The prophecies have been fulfilled. Repent, because only the righteous will enter into it!”

Jesus' central message focused on the Kingdom of God:

- Whenever the gospel writers summarized Jesus' ministry, they did so in terms of the Kingdom of God. They summed up Jesus' message as a proclamation of the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14–15**).
- Jesus described His mission by saying that He must preach the Kingdom of God (**Luke 4:43**).
- Time and again, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 8:1**).
- Many of Jesus' parables centered around the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 13:1–50; 18:21–35; 20:1–16; 21:28–22:14; 25:1–30; Mark 4:26–29**).
- When Jesus sent out the 12 and the 72, He only told them to say one thing—“The Kingdom of God is at hand” (**Matt. 10:5–7; Luke 10:1, 9**).
- After Jesus rose from the dead, He preached the Kingdom of God (**Acts 1:3**).

At this point in our study, Jesus has radically changed the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of the God. The arrival of the Kingdom is not apocalyptic. It does not overturn society. It does not break the nations. It does not sweep away all wickedness. Instead, the Kingdom begins in this present evil age with humble beginnings, and it grows into something great.

Moreover, righteousness in the Kingdom of God is not dependent upon one's adherence to the Old Testament Law. Righteousness is not based upon a person's formal conduct but upon conduct that evidences the true nature of one's inner being. In other words, righteousness is based upon a person's character, not conduct.

These changes have shaken to the core the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God. Jesus has taught that the Kingdom does not arrive in the manner they expected. It does not immediately accomplish all that they hoped for, and the requirements to enter into the Kingdom are different from what they thought. Now, in **Matthew 8:10–12**, Jesus delivers a deathblow to the Judaic mindset when He reveals that the Kingdom of God includes Gentiles and excludes some Jews.

Question 1: Reflecting on what we have learned thus far about the Kingdom of God, do you believe there is continuity or discontinuity with the Old Testament? In other words, when Jesus planted the Kingdom like a mustard seed during His first coming, was He planting something new because the Old Testament plan had failed, or was Jesus building upon Old Testament truths? Explain.

LESSON

Question 2: Did the Israelites believe Gentiles could participate in the Kingdom of God? Why?

Insight:

To the Jewish mind, the equation was simple: participants in the Kingdom of God must be biological descendants of Abraham, circumcised, and faithful to obey the Old Testament Law. According to this equation, Gentiles were necessarily excluded from God's Kingdom. Indeed, they were numbered among the wicked nations who would be brought into submission underneath the Messiah's iron scepter ([Psa. 2:8-9](#)).

Most Gentiles were not circumcised or faithful to the Old Testament Law, but even those who were could not be considered biological children of Abraham. Granted, some may have traced their lineage back to Abraham through Ishmael, but God later re-established His covenant with Isaac and Jacob, who was renamed Israel ([Gen. 26:1-5; 28:10-14](#)). Therefore, only Isaac and Jacob's descendants were qualified to be the people of God.

In contrast, any faithful Jew necessarily belonged to the Kingdom of God. Those who numbered among Abraham's biological descendants, were circumcised, and were faithful to

obey the Law, belonged to the covenant, and therefore, would participate in the Kingdom of God. However, this understanding was flawed.

Question 3: Reflecting upon both the Old Testament and Jesus' teachings, were the Jews wrong in their understanding of the requirements to participate in the Kingdom of God? Were they wrong to believe Gentiles could not participate in the Kingdom? Explain.

Insight:

Participation in the Kingdom of God is not dependent upon one's faithfulness to the Old Testament Law. Earlier, we discovered that Jesus not only fulfilled the Law, He also set it aside ([Matt. 11:11-13](#); [Mark 7:14-19](#)). No longer is a person judged by his adherence to the Law. Now a person is judged by his character. Likewise, with the affirmation of the Roman centurion's faith in [Matthew 8:10-13](#), Jesus set aside circumcision and ethnicity.

Some children of Abraham will not participate in the Kingdom of God even though they are circumcised, biological descendants of Abraham, and some Gentiles will participate in the Kingdom even though they are neither circumcised, nor Jewish—such as this Roman centurion. In fact, Jesus affirmed Old Testament examples of Kingdom participation by highlighting the Gentile widow from Sidon and the Syrian commander Naaman, whom the Lord healed ([Luke 4:25-27](#)).

Just as the Jews had misunderstood the arrival of the Kingdom, so also, they misunderstood the nature of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not ethnic because it is not of this world ([John 18:35-37](#)). Participation in God's Kingdom has never been limited to the Jews because participation has always been through faith. Circumcision and the Law were merely tools for expressing and demonstrating this faith ([Heb. 11:8-12](#)).

Question 4: According to [Genesis 12:1-3](#), what were God's original promises to Abraham, and were they conditional?

Insight:

God chose Abraham and, in response to his faith, supernaturally built him into a nation through which the Messiah—the King—could arrive and make a way for all people to participate in God’s Kingdom. Because Abraham obeyed God, God promised to bless all nations through Abraham and through his offspring ([Gen. 22:17–18](#)). This was affirmed to Abraham in many places ([Gen. 12:1–3](#); [12:4–7](#); [13:14–17](#); [15:1–21](#); [17:1–27](#); [18:17–19](#); [22:15–18](#)), and God also made this promise to Isaac and Jacob ([Gen. 26:1–5](#); [Gen. 28:10–14](#)).

Question 5: According to the covenant, God would build a nation out of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by multiplying their descendants and giving them a land to dwell in, and God would bless all nations and families of the earth through their offspring. Is this one promise, or two? According to [Galatians 3:16](#), should we understand this as one promise/train of thought, or as two? Why?

Insight:

It is easy to see how the Jews became confused in their understanding concerning who would be allowed to participate in the Kingdom. According to their understanding, God chose Abraham and promised to build him into a mighty nation—Israel—who would rule over its enemies. On Mount Sinai, God then promised to be Israel’s God and that the Jews would be a unique people. They would be God’s people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. Through Israel, all nations would be blessed when the Messiah finally sat upon

Israel's throne and ruled all the nations with an iron rod ... but this is not a correct understanding of what God had promised.

Indeed, God promised to multiply Abraham's descendants and to build them into a mighty nation. This, along with God's prophecy in [Genesis 15:13–16](#) regarding Israel's time in Egypt, their exodus, and their entering into the Promised Land of Canaan, was fulfilled. However, God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham's "seed" was a separate promise, referencing only one individual among Abraham's offspring. According to [Galatians 3:16](#), it was not a reference to all of Abraham's offspring—the many—but to Jesus Christ—one specific individual who would descend from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's line.

By conflating the two parts of God's promise, the Jews became confused in their understanding of who could participate in God's Kingdom. They believed themselves to be sons of the Kingdom by virtue of their ethnicity, but Jesus destroyed this thinking when the Roman centurion's faith was praised above all the Jews in Israel at that time ([Matt. 8:10–12](#)), and this is what the Apostle Paul clarified in [Galatians chapter 3](#). The Kingdom of God is not gained through one's biological relationship to Abraham. Likewise, the Kingdom of God is not gained through observing the Old Testament Law ([Gal. 3:17–22](#); [Rom. 4:13–14](#)). Instead, the Kingdom of God is gained through our relationship to Jesus Christ. It is gained through our being spiritually baptized into Jesus Christ ([Gal. 3:26–29](#)).

Question 6: According to [Romans 9:25–27](#), how many Jews will participate in the Kingdom of God?

Insight:

There will be Jews who do not participate in the Kingdom of God ([Matt. 8:10–12](#); [Luke 13:22–30](#)). This understanding of the Kingdom was revolutionary. The Kingdom of God is not gained through merit because God's covenant was established in faith, and it is only through faith that it can be realized ([Gal. 3:5–9, 26–29](#)). This is why some Jews were cut off from the promises in the wilderness ([Heb. 3:7–4:2](#)). There have always been those Jews who belonged to the covenant of God's Kingdom through faith and those who, through unbelief, belonged only to God's covenant to build Israel into a mighty nation. Therefore, the Apostle Paul taught that not all Jews are true Israel, belonging to the offspring to whom the promise was made ([Rom. 9:6–13](#)).

Question 7: According to **Galatians 3:6–9 and 26–29**, who are the sons of Abraham? Explain.

Insight:

Just as there will be Jews who *do not* participate in the Kingdom of God, so also there will be Gentiles who *do* participate in the Kingdom of God. All who place their faith in Jesus Christ are made equal partakers in God's covenant with Abraham (**Gal. 3:6–9, 26–29**). There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, male and female. There is no favoritism within the Kingdom of God. Because God's Kingdom is not of this world, it is not subject to the hierarchy of this world.

Galatians 3:6–9 and 26–29; Romans 9:24–33; Luke 13:22–30; and Matthew 8:10–12 all teach that not every Jew will be saved, and not every Gentile will be lost. Anyone who is in Jesus is a son of God, a co-heir with Jesus of the covenant, and a citizen of God's Kingdom. (**Rom. 8:1, 5, 8–11, 14–17; Php. 3:20, Col. 1:13–14**).

CONCLUSION

The initial elements of what would become the Kingdom of God in the New Testament were seen among the people of faith in the Old Testament. The Kingdom of God has always been spiritual in nature. It has never been restricted by ethnicity. As such, it has never been limited to the Jews. Instead, participation in the Kingdom has always been based upon faith. Some Jews have entered into the Kingdom through faith while others have failed to enter due to their unbelief.

This was a revolutionary understanding of the Kingdom, but Jesus' teaching did not change the requirement for entrance into the Kingdom of God. He merely clarified the requirements by exposing the error of the Jewish thinking. The good news of the gospel is that anyone can participate in the Kingdom of God if they enter by faith in Jesus Christ!

Suggested Prayer Points:

- The Jews believed their pedigree determined their relationship with God. Pray that we will be protected from believing that our spiritual heritage influences how God views us today.

- Some Jews believed they would experience the Kingdom of God because they followed all the religious rules. Pray that we will be protected from believing that our relationship with God is dependent upon what we do rather than upon our faith and trust in Him.
- Thank God that there is no favoritism within the Kingdom of God. Pray that we would be protected from showing favoritism toward those who appear to be more religiously acceptable.

Insight Answers for Questions
(Kingdom Participation)

Question 2:

- **Answer:** No. The Jews were the people of God. God made His covenant of the Kingdom with Abraham and his offspring (**Gen. 13:14–15**). Among all the peoples of the earth, God chose Abraham and his descendants to be His treasured possession and a holy nation (**Exo. 19:5–6**). Therefore, in the Jewish mind, participation in God’s Kingdom belonged to the Jews.
- **Answer:** No. Israel, being the descendants of Abraham, would rule over their enemies and bless all the nations of the earth (**Gen. 22:17–18**), and the sign of this covenant was circumcision (**Gen. 17:5–14**). Failure to be circumcised meant exclusion from the Jewish identity and from God’s covenant with the Jews (**Gen. 17:14**).
- **Answer:** No. Obedience to the Old Testament Law was another sign of the covenant (**Exo. 19:5–8; 24:3–8**). God’s promise to establish the Jews as a unique people who would be God’s treasured possession and a holy nation was contingent upon their obedience to His commandments. The words of the Law were known as “the Book of the Covenant.” Anyone who rejected the Law rejected God and His covenant of the Kingdom.
- **Answer:** No. Most Gentiles were not circumcised or faithful to the Old Testament Law, but even those who were could not be considered biological children of Abraham. Granted, some may have traced their lineage back to Abraham through Ishmael, but God later re-established His covenant with Isaac and Jacob, who was renamed Israel (**Gen. 26:1–5; 28:10–14**). Therefore, only Isaac and Jacob’s descendants were qualified to be the people of God.

Question 3:

- **Answer:** Yes, they were wrong in their understanding. This is what we will unpack in this lesson.
- **Answer:** Yes. Jesus affirmed Old Testament examples of Kingdom participation by highlighting the Gentile widow from Sidon and the Syrian commander Naaman, whom the Lord healed (**Luke 4:25–27**).

Question 4:

- **Answer:** Yes. These promises were made before Abram (later to be renamed Abraham) left his kinsmen. The condition was that Abraham leave his country, his kinsmen, and his father’s house and travel to a land that God would show him. If Abraham would do this, then God promised to:
 - 1) make a great nation out of him.
 - 2) bless him.
 - 3) make Abraham’s name great.
 - 4) make him a blessing to others.
 - 5) bless those who blessed Abraham.
 - 6) curse those who cursed Abraham.
 - 7) bless all families on Earth through him.

Question 5:

- **Answer:** According to **Galatians 3:16**, these are two distinct promises within God's covenant. In other words, Abraham and the Jewish nation that would come from him would be blessed, and secondly, all the nations of the world would be blessed through the Messiah that would come from his family line.
- **Answer:** It is easy to understand how the Jews would have understood this to be one promise. Without the clarification provided in the New Testament, we couldn't be certain whether this is one promise or two.

Question 6:

- **Answer:** Only the minority—the remnant—of Jews will be saved. Not every Jew will participate in the Kingdom.

Question 7:

- **Answer:** Abraham has two kinds of children. The first is biological, being descended from his family line. The second is adopted, being incorporated into the family line through their relationship to Jesus. Anyone who has been united to Jesus through faith has been incorporated into Abraham's family tree and are heirs of the covenant.

ONE SPIRITUAL PEOPLE OF GOD

LESSON 7

INTRODUCTION

Jesus has radically changed the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of the God. The arrival of the Kingdom is not apocalyptic. It does not overturn society. It does not break the nations. It does not sweep away all wickedness. Instead, the Kingdom begins in this present evil age with humble beginnings, and it grows into something great.

Moreover, righteousness in the Kingdom of God is not dependent upon one's adherence to the Old Testament Law. Righteousness is not based upon a person's formal conduct but upon conduct that evidences the true nature of one's inner being. In other words, righteousness is based upon a person's character, not conduct.

Finally, the Kingdom of God is not limited to the Jews. Rather, some Jews *will not* participate in the Kingdom, and some Gentiles *will* participate in the Kingdom. The key is not one's relationship to Abraham but one's relationship to Jesus. Anyone who has been spiritually baptized into Jesus through faith has been incorporated into the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus ([Gal. 3:16](#)).

Question 1: According to [Hebrews 3:7–11 and 19](#), there were Old Testament Jews who did not accept God's ways and whose hearts were always going astray through unbelief. What are some examples where the people rejected God through unbelief?

Question 2: What are some examples from the Old Testament of Gentiles who worshipped the true God?

Through His teachings, Jesus has demolished the common understanding of what it meant to be a Jew. Whereas the Jews focused on ancestry, circumcision, and observing the Law; Jesus focused on the heart. The people of God are those who have placed their faith in Him, who have accepted His lordship over their lives, and whose character is in the process of being conformed to match the character of God.

LESSON

Question 3: If God is interested in the heart rather than ancestry, then why did God build the Jews into a nation?

Insight:

Certainly, God has focused on national Israel. Much of the Old Testament is an historical account of God's dealings with Israel as a nation who was supernaturally built up and preserved as the people through whom God's Messiah would come into the world. They were a nation in special relationship with God. In this sense, Israel was the people of God, meaning that they were a nation who was devoted to God and through whom God was working. However, the people of God, meaning the people who belong to the Kingdom of God, have never been Israel as a nation. Instead, the people of God have always been what the Apostle Paul calls "the Israel of God" ([Gal. 6:15-16](#)). These are those who have become spiritual children of Abraham through faith ([Rom. 9:6-8](#); [Gal. 3:7-9](#)). As such, some have referred to the people of God who belong to the Kingdom as "spiritual Israel."

The Abrahamic Covenant had two parts—God promised to build Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s offspring into a mighty nation, and secondly, God promised to bless all nations through Abraham’s singular offspring, Jesus ([Gen. 22:17–18](#); [26:1–5](#); [28:10–14](#); [Gal. 3:7–9](#)). Because of this, the title of God’s people in the Bible assumes two forms. The first is God’s people who comprise national Israel, referring to the people whom God built into a mighty nation and who were to be separated and devoted unto Himself. This includes all who are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s offspring. The second is God’s people who comprise spiritual Israel, referring to all who received God’s promise of the Kingdom by faith. Spiritual Israel was a subset of national Israel, and it included some who were not ethnic Jews. However, this understanding of spiritual Israel remained a mystery until the time of the New Testament ([Eph. 3:1–10](#)).

Question 4: According to [Ephesians 3:1–6](#), what is the mystery of God?

Insight:

Jews and Gentiles both belong to God’s spiritual Israel—the people of God through faith ([Gal. 3:26–29](#)). According to the Apostle Paul, this truth was a mystery in the time of the Old Testament, meaning that it was not formerly understood but is now revealed ([Col. 1:24–27](#)). God has never changed His plan concerning His Kingdom.

Question 5: How does [Ephesians 2:11–22](#), reveal that by uniting both Jews and Gentiles, God is neither giving up on His original plan for salvation, nor is He substituting His people with a new people?

Insight:

When God's Kingdom was established, the Gentiles did not replace the Jews in God's redemptive plan. Neither did the uniting of the Gentiles and the Jews together into the church replace God's promises to Israel as a nation. Instead, the Gentiles were grafted into God's promise to bless all nations—meaning that they were grafted into the Kingdom of God (**Gal. 3:8; Rom. 11:11–26**).

The olive tree is a common symbol for Israel in the Bible. In Romans 11, the cultivated olive tree represents Israel. However, God supernaturally built Israel into His covenant nation because of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's faith. Therefore, the roots of this tree represent the Jewish patriarchs who were made righteous through their faith. Some of the natural branches were broken off because they may have been descendants of these patriarchs, but through unbelief, they were neither righteous, nor did they belong to God's covenant—to spiritual Israel. In their place, Gentiles (wild olive branches) have been grafted into the tree that is God's people, spiritual Israel.

Question 6: How does **Romans 11:11–26**, reveal that by uniting both Jews and Gentiles, God is neither giving up on His original plan for salvation, nor is He substituting His people with a new people?

Question 7: As you consider God's plan to establish His Kingdom on Earth, what is the significance of the imagery of there being only one olive tree as the people of God?

Question 8: What are examples of other imagery that the Bible uses to convey the truth that God has only ever had one people of God—and that people consists today of both Jews and Gentiles whose foundation and heritage is the same, who share the same hope, and who comprise the same Kingdom?

CONCLUSION

There is continuity between the Old Testament teaching of God's Kingdom and its participants, and the New Testament teaching of God's Kingdom and its participants. The Bible is not about God's people the Jews in the Old Testament and God's people the church in the New Testament. In the New Testament, God is not giving up on an old plan and starting something entirely new to accomplish His goal of redeeming creation. Instead, the entire Bible is about Jesus as the promised offspring of Abraham through whom all nations—Jews and Gentiles alike—would be blessed ([Gal. 3:8](#); [Heb. 10:7](#)).

Jesus' revolutionary teaching destroyed the Jewish concept of the people of God, and this was a significant factor in their rejection of Him as their Messiah. Jesus' teaching and the teaching of the New Testament apostles provides us with the assurance that Gentiles are full members of God's household. We are not an after-thought in God's plan, and neither are we second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God. Instead, we look ahead to the very same promises as the Jews, and this is our blessed hope ([Rom. 8:16–25](#); [Tit. 2:11–14](#); [1 Pet. 1:3–5](#)).

Suggested Prayer Points:

- As the people of God, pray that we will be truly set apart and devoted to God.

- Thank God that He has chosen to reveal to us the mystery of how He has chosen to unite Jews and Gentiles together as co-heirs of the same promises. Pray that we would be protected from the efforts of those who seek to build a barrier of separation between Jews and Gentiles by requiring that Gentiles adopt Jewish customs, dates, and religious practices in order to be right with God. Likewise, pray that we will be protected from believing that today's predominantly Gentile church has replaced Israel.
- The Bible is not about God's people the Jews in the Old Testament and God's people the church in the New Testament. Pray that we would embrace the Old Testament as being just as important in our spiritual lives as the teachings of the New Testament.

Insight Answers for Questions
(Will You Contrast the World?)

Question 1:

- **Answer:** The golden calf of the Exodus (Exo. 32:1–6).
- **Answer:** The worship of Baal and of false gods (Num. 25:1–3; Deut. 32:9–21).
- **Answer:** Child sacrifices to the false god Molech (Jer. 32:30–35).
- **Answer:** King Jeroboam's substitute religion (1 Kings 12:26–33).

Question 2:

- **Answer:** Melchizedek was the King of Salem and a priest of God Most High (Gen. 14:18–20).
- **Answer:** Caleb was a Kenizzite, one of the Canaanite tribes, and yet Numbers 32:12 says that he fully followed the Lord (Gen. 15:18–21).
- **Answer:** Ruth was a Moabite who followed the Lord (Ruth 1:4, 16).
- **Answer:** Naaman was commander of the Syrian army who followed the Lord (2 Kings 5:1, 17).

Question 3:

- **Answer:** God used Israel as a nation that was set apart and devoted to Him to accomplish His redemptive purposes. Through Israel, God communicated His Law that demonstrated to mankind its need for a savior. Through Israel, God demonstrated His power over creation and over the false gods of the other nations. Through Israel, God demonstrated His holiness and revealed His glory. And through Israel, God entered into His creation as a man, born of a woman.

Question 4:

- **Answer:** In Jesus, both Jew and Gentile are made one, being co-heirs of the same promises ... and this has always been God's plan.

Question 5:

- **Answer:** What God is accomplishing is an extension of what He was accomplishing in the Old Testament. God is building upon the foundation of the Old Testament prophets who foretold of a time when God would reconcile mankind to Himself, forgive sins, and bless all nations.
- **Answer:** Gentiles are fellow citizens with the Jewish saints. Together the two are being built into a holy temple that rests upon the foundation of what God accomplished through both the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. Nothing in this imagery suggests that anything has been removed or replaced. Instead, the foundation would be incomplete without the work of both the prophets and the apostles.
- **Answer:** The imagery is one of addition rather than substitution. The Gentiles are brought into the household of God which already exists in the form of the primarily Jewish Old Testament saints.
- **Answer:** Jesus is not an addition to God's plan that was created before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3–4). It is no accident that Jesus was put to death by the Jews in order to reconcile both Jew and Gentile together through His body. Jesus is the cornerstone of the temple that God is building. In ancient times, the cornerstone was

the first stone laid when constructing a building. The rest of the building would then be constructed in alignment to the cornerstone.

Question 6:

- **Answer:** God does not uproot the cultivated olive tree. Rather than replace the entire tree, God replaces some of the branches.
- **Answer:** God does not strip the tree of all its branches, leaving only the root. In other words, God does not cut off and reject all Jews. Instead, God leaves the believing Jews while grafting in the believing Gentiles. Together they become one tree.
- **Answer:** The Gentile believers, represented as wild olive branches, receive nourishment from the Jewish patriarchs, represented by the roots of the tree. In other words, the hope of the Gentiles is sustained by the faith of the Jewish patriarchs and God's promises to them.

Question 7:

- **Answer:** God has only one people. There is not God's people the Jews and God's people the Gentiles. Neither is there God's people the church and God's people Israel. Instead, there is only one people of God whose lineage can be traced back to before the foundation of the world when they were merely a thought in the mind of God (Rom. 9:6–8; Eph. 1:3–6; 3:11).

Question 8:

- **Answer:** There is only one flock (John 10:14–16). Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and His flock consists of both Jews and Gentiles. He spoke of having sheep who were not from the Jewish fold. These Gentile sheep were His, but they were kept separate through laws added by the Jews. However, Jesus has abolished these laws and has merged His Gentile and Jewish sheep into one flock.
- **Answer:** There is only one body (Eph. 3:3–6). There is not a Jewish body of Christ and a Gentile body of Christ. Neither is Jesus' body divided (1 Cor. 1:13).
- **Answer:** There is only one New Jerusalem and one bride (Rev. 21:2, 9–14). Like the temple of God in Ephesians 2:11–12 and 19–22, the imagery of the New Jerusalem incorporates imagery from both the Old and New Testaments. It is founded upon the New Testament apostles, and it is accessed through the 12 tribes of Israel.

THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

LESSON 8

INTRODUCTION

So far we've discovered:

- 1) Jesus' central message focused on the Kingdom of God.
- 2) If we want to be gospel-centric Christians, then we must be focused on the Kingdom of God.
- 3) In a broad sense, the Kingdom of God refers to the rule and reign of God over all of creation. Of course, we know that while all of creation may be underneath God's authority, not all of creation presently submits itself to God's will. Therefore, in a more narrow sense, the phrase "Kingdom of God" in the Bible usually anticipates a specific time when all of creation will submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God.
- 4) The faithful people of God will rule and reign alongside Jesus, exercising His full authority, and Jesus will serve as King of Kings and Lord of Lords ([1 Tim. 6:13-16](#); [Rev. 17:14](#); [19:11-16](#)).
- 5) The Jews believed the arrival of the Kingdom would be an apocalyptic event, being a time of judgment when God finally conquered His enemies. But according to Jesus, the Kingdom of God does not come in a dramatic way. The Kingdom of God becomes a reality before it comes in a powerful and dramatic way.
- 6) Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God is a present reality on Earth. It is already functioning because Jesus, the King, has arrived, and where the King is, there also is the Kingdom.
- 7) Jesus challenged the Jewish thinking by teaching that righteousness in the Kingdom of God is not dependent upon one's adherence to the Old Testament Law. Righteousness is based upon a person's character, not conduct.
- 8) Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is not limited to the Jews. Some Jews *will not* participate in the Kingdom, and some Gentiles *will* participate in the Kingdom. The key is not one's relationship to Abraham but one's relationship to Jesus. Anyone who has been spiritually baptized into Jesus through faith has been incorporated into the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus ([Gal. 3:16](#)).

Jesus' teaching has shaken to the core the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God. Jesus has taught that the Kingdom does not arrive in the manner they expected; it does not immediately accomplish all that they hoped for, and the requirements to enter into the Kingdom are different from what they thought. Through His teachings, Jesus has demolished the common understanding of what it meant to be a Jew. Whereas the Jews focused on ancestry, circumcision, and observing the Law; Jesus focused on the heart. The people of God are those who have placed their faith in Him, who have accepted His lordship over their lives, and whose character is in the process of being conformed to match the character of God.

LESSON

Insight:

The church is integral to the Kingdom of God. Beginning in the Old Testament, the church has always been at the heart of God's Kingdom. To understand this, we must take some time to study the nature and composition of the church.

Question 1: What is the meaning of the word "church?"

Insight:

In the New Testament, the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, can refer to an assembling of God's people for worship (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:19, 28, 35). It can refer to the people of God who assemble in a particular location (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phlm. 1:2). It can designate the totality of God's people living in one area (Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:16; Gal. 1:2, 22). And it can refer to the totality of God's people from all places (Col. 1:18, 24; Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23–32).

Question 2: Was there a church in the Old Testament?

Insight:

God's church in the Old Testament assumed two forms in keeping with the understanding that the Abrahamic Covenant was two-fold. There was the church—meaning national Israel—that was a nation separated unto God in its government and practice, and there was the church—meaning spiritual Israel—that was a people separated unto God through faith (*Rom. 9:6–8; Gal. 3:7–9, 27–29*).

Note: Some of God's promises were made specifically to the nation of Israel as a nation separated unto God in its government and practice. The church today is not a replacement of Israel and cannot accept for itself national promises that were made to Israel. Instead, there have always been some promises of God made to the church of Israel as a called-out nation, and others made to the church comprised of a called-out people from among all ethnic groups.

Question 3: What are some examples of Gentiles who belonged to the Old Testament church, meaning that while they were not Jews by birth, they were still God's people through their faith?

Insight:

Implicit in the New Testament use of the word “church” is the claim that the church stands in continuity with the Old Testament people of God. God does not differentiate between Old Testament saints and New Testament saints. Both are the people of God through faith—spiritual Israel—and as such, are members of God's church. *Ephesians 2:11–22* speaks of God's church as consisting of both Jews and Gentiles who are being built into a holy temple in which God lives. This temple is built upon the foundation of both the New Testament apostles and the Old Testament prophets who foretold the Kingdom of God. In other words, New Testament saints are incorporated into God's building which began with the Old Testament saints.

The Apostle Peter uses this same imagery in *1 Peter chapter 2*. Like the Apostle Paul, he refers to Jesus as the cornerstone of a spiritual house of God, consisting of the New Testament Jewish saints (*1 Pet. 2:4–7*). According to Peter, these New Testament Saints are part of the same congregation—the same church—as the Old Testament saints.

Question 4: According to **1 Peter 2:9**; **Exodus 19:5–6**; and **Deuteronomy 7:6**, what titles does the Apostle Peter use to refer to New Testament saints which are the same as God uses to refer to Old Testament saints?

Question 5: According to **1 Peter 2:10**, how do the New Testament saints fulfill God's prophecy toward Israel in **Hosea 1:6–10**?

Insight:

The imagery and allusions used by the Apostle Peter demonstrate his understanding of the relationship between the followers of Jesus and the people of God in the Old Testament. According to Peter, there is no distinction; they belong to the same group—spiritual Israel, which is the church. And the Apostle Paul applies this same prophecy in Hosea to the church which consists of both Jews and Gentiles (**Rom. 9:24–26**). Therefore, the church is not something unique to the New Testament.

The New Testament church is merely a continuation of the Old Testament church. This is further evident in the analogies that are used to depict the church. There is one flock (**John 10:14–16**), one olive tree (**Rom. 11:11–26**), one household of God, one temple of God (**Eph. 2:11–22**), one body (**Eph. 3:3–6**), one New Jerusalem, and one bride of Christ (**Rev. 21:2, 9–14**).

The church, as the people of God, existed before Christ's first coming, and it will exist after His second coming. The church—meaning spiritual Israel—includes the pre-Jewish patriarchal saints, such as Adam, Noah, and Job. The church also includes the Old Testament Jewish believers, along with some foreigners, such as Caleb, Ruth, and Naaman. Additionally, the church includes Jewish and Gentile New Testament saints. Finally, the church will include saints from the coming Great Tribulation and the Millennial Kingdom. Together, all these people of God form one undivided body—one bride of Christ—who share the same hope (**Rom. 8:16–25; 1 Cor. 1:13; Tit. 2:11 – 14; 1 Pet. 1:3–5**).

To confine the church to New Testament saints is to miss the bigger picture of what God is accomplishing. It is to miss the imagery of the Bible; it is to miss the continuity of the language of the Bible, and it is to miss Jesus' essential message that the promised Kingdom of God has arrived. **The Old Testament saints hoped for this promise, but in the New Testament, saints can experience the fulfillment of this promise.**

Question 6: If the church has existed from the time of Adam, then what occurred at Pentecost in **Acts chapter 2**?

Insight:

The church is synonymous with spiritual Israel, but lest we become confused, the New Testament also uses the word “church” as a technical term referring to a local assembly of God's people. Some have parsed the definition of “church” as saying that there is the Universal Church, which consists of all God's saints throughout all time, and there is the Local Church, which consists of those Christians who gather together in a particular area (**Rom. 16:5; Gal. 1:1–2**).

CONCLUSION

The church refers to the people of God who have left the Kingdom of Darkness and have become citizens of God's Kingdom. As such, the church is at the center of God's Kingdom and His redemptive plan. The church has always been at the heart of God's redemptive plan because at the heart of God's redemptive plan is the creation of a people who are devoted to Him. As Glenn Sunshine and Jerry Trousedale state in *The Kingdom Unleashed*, “[T]he church is not an end in itself, but the means to build the Kingdom.” As such, the

church is integral to realizing the eternal Kingdom of God, having been birthed in the mind of God before creation. Indeed, it is the church that today continues the Kingdom insurgence that Jesus began.

Suggested Prayer Points:

- As God's representation on earth, pray that we the church, being His called-out ones, will be fully surrendered to His lordship, following His will and ways.
- The Bible emphasizes the idea that God's people are one group. Pray that we will be protected from the temptation to divide God's people into segregated groups, such as Old Testaments saints, the church, end times Jewish believers, and Millennial saints.
- The church was not birthed in Acts chapter 2. Instead, the church received the promised outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the New Covenant that God had made with His people. Pray that God will expand our understanding of the significance of Acts chapter 2.

Insight Answers for Questions
(The Kingdom and the Church)

Question 1:

- **Answer:** The Greek word for church is *ekklesia* which means “a called-out assembly,” or “those who have been called out.” The church is an assembly of God’s people who have been called out from the world to be separated and devoted unto God.
- **Answer:** “Church” does not refer to a building but to a people (**Rom. 16:5**).

Question 2:

- **Answer:** Yes. The word “church” refers to a congregation of people who are separated from the ways of the world and devoted to God. Throughout the Old Testament, God referred to the Israelites as the church because they were a nation that was separated from among the other nations and devoted to God. The Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Old Testament frequently uses *ekklesia*, the Greek word for church, to refer to the Israelites (**Gen. 48:4; Deut. 31:30; Psalms 22:22**). Often this is translated as “multitude,” “assembly,” and “congregation” in English versions of the Bible.
- **Answer:** In **Acts 7:37–38**, Stephen referred to Israel in the Old Testament as “the church.” As a Hellenized Jew, Stephen followed Greek customs and likely read from the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. Therefore, Stephen, like many early Christians, was familiar with the biblical concept that God’s church in the Old Testament was the nation of Israel.

Question 3:

- **Answer:** Melchizedek was the King of Salem and a priest of God Most High (**Gen. 14:18–20**).
- **Answer:** Caleb was a Kenizzite, one of the Canaanite tribes, and yet **Numbers 32:12** says that he fully followed the Lord (**Gen. 15:18–21**).
- **Answer:** Ruth was a Moabite who followed the Lord (**Ruth 1:4, 16**).
- **Answer:** Naaman was commander of the Syrian army who followed the Lord (**2 Kings 5:1, 17**).

Question 4:

- **Answer:** “A chosen race;” “God’s own possession” (**1 Peter 2:9**). **Exodus 19:5** refers to Israel as “God’s treasured possession among all peoples,” and **Deuteronomy 7:6** says that “God has chosen [Israel] to be a people for His treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”
- **Answer:** “A royal priesthood” (**1 Peter 2:9**). **Exodus 19:5** refers to Israel as a “kingdom of priests.”
- **Answer:** “A holy nation” (**1 Peter 2:9**). **Exodus 19:5** refers to Israel as “a holy nation,” and **Deuteronomy 7:6** says that Israel is “a people holy to the Lord.”

Question 5:

- **Answer:** Those upon whom God would have no mercy in **Hosea 1:6** have now received mercy according to **1 Peter 2:10** and in fulfillment of **Hosea 1:10**.
- **Answer:** Those who were not God’s people in **Hosea 1:9** have now become the people of God according to **1 Peter 2:10** and in fulfillment of **Hosea 1:10**.

Question 6:

- **Answer:** The church was not birthed in Acts chapter 2. Instead, the church received the promised outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the New Covenant that God had made with His people (**Jer. 31:31–34; Eze. 11:19–21; 36:26–27; Joel 2:28–29**). Pentecost was the fulfillment of God’s promises to the Old Testament Jewish saints—to spiritual Israel.
- **Answer:** Pentecost symbolized a reversal of God’s judgment upon the nations at the Tower of Babel. At the Tower of Babel, God disinherited the nations because of their rebellion, but He established Israel as His allotted inheritance (**Deut. 4:19–20; 32:8–9**). At Pentecost, Jews were present who lived among the disinherited nations listed in **Genesis 10**, revealing that God was about to spread the Kingdom from Israel throughout the entire world. This is signified in part by the supernatural unifying of the languages through the gift of tongues, in contrast to the supernatural dividing of the languages in Genesis (**Acts 2:4; Gen. 11:7**). God poured out His Spirit at Pentecost to equip His people to serve as mobile outposts, establishing the Kingdom in their respective countries.
- **Answer:** Pentecost marked the beginning of “the time of the Gentiles” (**Luke 21:24; Rom. 11:25**). This is a time when the majority of Israel will reject Jesus, and therefore, reject the Abrahamic covenant of the Kingdom. In contrast, the Gentiles will accept it and experience the very promises that Israel hopes for. Eventually, this will provoke Israel to jealousy, and the Jews will humble themselves and receive Jesus as their Messiah (**Rom. 11:11**). In the interim time, the Gentiles do not replace Israel, but they do experience the promises of God that were originally spoken to the Jews. The Holy Spirit indwells them, and they participate in the Kingdom of God.

KINGDOM AUTHORITY

LESSON 9

INTRODUCTION

We have been studying the gospel. The gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God. In fact, we've paraphrased Jesus' gospel message in **Mark 1:14-15** as saying, "The good news—the gospel—is that the Kingdom of God, for which we have been hoping, has come to us. The prophecies have been fulfilled. Repent, because only the righteous will enter into it!"

We've discovered that Jesus' central message focused on the Kingdom of God:

- Whenever the gospel writers summarized Jesus' ministry, they did so in terms of the Kingdom of God. They summed up Jesus' message as a proclamation of the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15**).
- Jesus described His mission by saying that He must preach the Kingdom of God (**Luke 4:43**).
- Time and again, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 8:1**).
- Many of Jesus' parables centered around the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 13:1-50; 18:21-35; 20:1-16; 21:28-22:14; 25:1-30; Mark 4:26-29**).
- When Jesus sent out the 12 and the 72, He only told them to say one thing—"The Kingdom of God is at hand" (**Matt. 10:5-7; Luke 10:1, 9**).
- After Jesus rose from the dead, He preached the Kingdom of God (**Acts 1:3**).

Through His teachings, Jesus has demolished the common understanding of what it meant to be a Jew. Whereas the Jews focused on ancestry, circumcision, and observing the Law; Jesus focused on the heart. The people of God—the church—are those who have placed their faith in Him, who have accepted His lordship over their lives, and whose character is in the process of being conformed to match the character of God.

The church refers to the people of God who have left the Kingdom of Darkness and have become citizens of God's Kingdom. As such, the church is at the center of God's Kingdom and His redemptive plan. The church has always been at the heart of God's redemptive plan because at the heart of God's redemptive plan is the creation of a people who are devoted to Him. As such, the church is eternal, having been birthed in the mind of God before creation and being integral to God's eternal Kingdom.

LESSON

Question 1: According to **Matthew 13:17**, there is one thing that distinguishes the New Testament church from the Old Testament church. What is it?

Insight:

The New Testament church has experienced the fulfillment of God's promise to establish a New Covenant with His people. Most notably, in the Old Testament church, God dwelt among His people in a temple of stone, but in the New Testament church, God dwells within His people who serve as a spiritual temple (Eph. 2:19–22).

The Jews looked ahead to a time when God would indwell a new temple in His Kingdom (Eze. 37:26–28; 43:2–5; Hag. 2:9). What they failed to understand is that what would make this new temple so magnificent was that it would not be a stationary building, but a mobile community of people (Mark 14:58). Today, the people of God serve as God's temple (1 Cor. 6:19–20; Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–5).

Wherever Christians are, the King and His Kingdom are present (Col. 1:13–14). God's Kingdom invaded this present evil age with the arrival of Jesus as its King, and its presence continues to expand as God's people take the message of the Kingdom to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Question 2: Are the church and the Kingdom the same thing? Explain.

Insight:

The term “church” is often used in the New Testament as a technical term—referring to a local assembly of God's people—but in this study, we've focused on its use in the Bible to refer to the people of God generally. As such, it is distinct from the Kingdom because it refers to those who will populate that Kingdom. Furthermore, the church today has a role

in expanding the Kingdom of God that it will not have once the Kingdom is fully established.

We should be careful not to become overly focused on vocabulary. The term church, as it appears in both the Old and New Testaments, may become obsolete or outdated once the Kingdom of God is present in its fullness. As highlighted in the last lesson, church means a “called-out assembly,” but in the next age, everyone will be among the called-out because the weeds will be gone, and only the wheat will remain (Matt. 13:24–30). As such, it is important to think of the church simply as God’s people—recognizing that God’s people today are unique in that they—unlike God’s people in the Old Testament—are presently experiencing the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom promises.

Question 3: What is the essence of Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20? What does Jesus hope to accomplish through His Great Commission?

Insight:
God has chosen to use His people to spread the Kingdom. Rather than overwhelm the world with an apocalyptic display of His power and authority, God has chosen to demonstrate how participation in His Kingdom is superior to the Devil’s kingdom. As such, God has chosen to work through His people, granting them the opportunity to rule with Him as, together, they conquer His enemies (1 Cor. 15:24–26).

Question 4: How does Matthew 28:18–20 grant God’s people authority to rule alongside Him?

Insight:

Our authority is conferred by God. We do not possess the authority to do whatever we wish, nor is our authority unlimited. Instead, we have been granted parameters in which we exercise all authority over our enemies to accomplish God's will in spreading the gospel and making disciples.

Question 5: Who are our enemies?

Insight:

Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on Earth (**Matt. 28:18**). He is not sitting on the sidelines in heaven awaiting the day when He can return to Earth and begin ruling. Neither is He aloof and distant because He is in heaven. Instead, Jesus is currently ruling. He has disarmed His enemies through His ministry on the cross, and He has been seated in authority above them all (**Eph. 1:20–23; Col. 2:15**).

Question 6: What is the significance of Jesus having been seated at the right hand of God the Father according to **Ephesians 1:20–23** and **Psalms 110:1–2**?

Insight:

Jesus sits in heaven enthroned as both God and King (Eph. 1:20–23). In Luke 22:69, Jesus offered a picture of Himself sitting enthroned at the right hand of the God of power, exercising God’s almighty power as the Son of Man, whom Daniel 7:13–14 presents as King over the Kingdom of God. We know that He is enthroned because Jesus is seated, and only royalty sits in the throne room. Furthermore, Jesus portrays Himself as the right hand of the King, something that was common in ancient cultures. The king’s right hand exercised all the authority of the king on his behalf to accomplish the king’s will. As such, Jesus exercises all the authority of the Almighty God of power, ruling over the Kingdom on His behalf.

Question 7: What is the significance of our having been seated in the heavenlies with Jesus according to Ephesians 2:4–7?

Question 8: If we are presently ruling with Jesus, then why don’t we see all things conform to our will?

Insight:

Even as we presently reign with Christ, there is also a sense in which our rule is still a future event (2 Tim. 2:11–12; Rev. 5:9–10). This is because there is a sense in which Jesus' rule remains a future event (Rev. 11:15–17). As we have already considered, the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated, and Jesus is presently King over all things; nevertheless, we still await the consummation of the Kingdom when all of creation will submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God. Until then, not all of creation acknowledges God's authority and submits itself to His will.

In one sense, the Kingdom of God has already arrived, and in another sense, it is in the process of arriving. The Kingdom of God exists as a present reality on Earth in which Jesus has the authority and right to rule, and in which Jesus is extending the realm where all things are in subjection to Him, but the Kingdom has not yet reached its full culmination. Prior to the consummation of the Kingdom, there remains a time when not all of creation submits to God's will. During this time, Jesus is King, but His Kingdom is not yet of this world (John 18:36). Instead, Jesus is in the process of subduing His enemies and subjecting the world to His authority (1 Cor. 15:23–26). When this is complete, then the faithful people of God will rule and reign over all of creation with Jesus' full authority, and Jesus will serve as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:13–16; Rev. 17:14; 19:11–16). Until then, we as the church participate with Jesus in His efforts to subject all things to Himself.

CONCLUSION

We have the incredible privilege of participating with Jesus as He expands His Kingdom and subjects His enemies to His authority. We serve as mobile outposts for the Kingdom who expand the Kingdom by bringing the hope of the gospel wherever we go. To accomplish this, we have been commissioned and empowered by Him who possesses all authority in heaven and on Earth. How we choose to accomplish this is left to us to decide. As such, there is a sense in which we are presently co-ruling with Jesus as He seeks to accomplish His primary task of expanding the Kingdom and subjecting His enemies to His authority.

Suggested Prayer Points:

- We have the incredible privilege of participating with Jesus as He expands His Kingdom and subjects His enemies to His authority. Ask God to protect us from the temptation of taking this privilege for granted and from squandering the opportunities we have been given to expand God's Kingdom.
- Wherever Christians are, the King and His Kingdom are present. Ask God to grant us an unwavering boldness as we proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God.
- We have been commissioned and empowered by Him who possesses all authority in heaven and on Earth to expand God's Kingdom by proclaiming the gospel and living lives that model life in the Kingdom. Pray that we will be more focused on Kingdom values and goals than on the values and goals of this world.

Insight Answers for Questions
(Kingdom Authority)

Question 1:

- **Answer:** The Old Testament saints longed for the fulfillment of the promised Kingdom of God; whereas, the New Testament church experiences the Kingdom of God as a present reality. In other words, the Old Testament church looked ahead to the Kingdom of God; the New Testament church actively participates in the Kingdom of God.

Question 2:

- **Answer:** No. In their book *The Kingdom Unleashed*, Jerry Trousdale and Glenn Sunshine write, “We should note that there is a difference between the Kingdom and the church. God’s purpose is to build His Kingdom; the church exists to promote and advance the Kingdom. The church is to prepare and equip Christians to bring Christ’s authority (i.e. the Kingdom) to bear in all areas of life. Like a Roman soldier outside of the Empire, Christians bring the Kingdom with them wherever they go as long as they acknowledge Jesus as Lord and live in obedience to Him. The Kingdom is thus much broader than the church. To put it differently, the church is not an end in itself, but the means to build the Kingdom.”
- **Answer:** No. *The Moody Handbook of Theology* notes, “[T]he basic meaning of kingdom involves three things: a ruler, a people who are ruled, and a territory over which they are ruled. ... The terms *church* and *kingdom* are never used interchangeably in Scripture. Of the 114 occurrences of the word *church* (Gk. *Ekklesia*), it is never equated with the kingdom.”

Question 3:

- **Answer:** The goal is to bring others into the Kingdom of God.
- **Answer:** People are brought into the Kingdom of God when they identify through baptism with the disciples’ message. They then must learn how to be good citizens of the Kingdom. As this happens, the insurgency spreads, and the Kingdom of God expands. **Note:** Baptism is an outward expression of a person’s heart-commitment to follow Jesus. It is symbolic, representing our unity with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and our immersion into His spiritual body—the church (Rom. 6:3–6; 1 Cor. 12:12–13; Gal. 3:26–27). While baptism has no inherent saving power, it is Jesus’ first command to the new believer. As such, baptism is an expression of obedience, demonstrating to others the heart-decision that has been made to change one’s allegiance.

Question 4:

- **Answer:** Jesus is King; He possesses dominion over everything. Implicit in this commission is that when the disciples act in obedience to Jesus’ command, they will exercise Jesus’ authority. Jesus grants His people authority over their enemies to spread the gospel and to make disciples.
- **Answer:** Jesus promises to be with—or alongside—His followers through the end of the age.

Question 5:

- **Answer:** Our enemies are God's enemies. They are spiritual, not physical (**Eph. 6:11–12**). The rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil mentioned in Ephesians are titles used throughout the New Testament for demonic forces.
- **Answer:** People are not our enemies because God wants to win the hearts and minds of people. People may serve our enemy, and therefore, are at enmity with God, but they are not the enemy themselves (**Rom. 8:7; James 4:4**).

Question 6:

- **Answer:** God's throne in heaven is the epitome of authority, being depicted as high above all other authority (**Psa. 113:4–5**). Jesus sits enthroned beside God the Father as an eternal ruler whose authority surpasses all others, both physical and spiritual. According to **Ephesians 1:21**, Jesus' rule has begun in this present evil age, and it will continue through the coming age of God when all of creation submits to the righteous and just reign and rule of God.
- **Answer:** Jesus is not idly sitting beside His Father. According to **Psalms 110:2**, Jesus is ruling in the midst of His enemies. Jesus has begun His rule during this present evil age, during which time He has been tasked with subjecting all His enemies to His authority. In fact, the end of this age will not come until Jesus has subjected all His enemies (**1 Cor. 15:24–26**).

Question 7:

- **Answer:** The Apostle Paul speaks of our being seated in heaven with Jesus as a past event. Positionally, we are presently seated with Jesus upon His throne in heaven. As such, we have been granted the opportunity to share in the authority that comes with the throne. We have been granted the authority to rule with Jesus even now, in this present evil age.
- **Answer:** We have been united with Jesus, having been baptized into Him; therefore, we are positionally seated with Him upon His throne of authority and participate in His rulership (**Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27**).

Question 8:

- **Answer:** We have not been granted authority to conform all things to our will. We have been granted authority to subject our spiritual enemies to the will of God (**John 14:12–14; James 4:2–3**).
- **Answer:** While we may long for certain outcomes, God has not granted us the prerogative to override the choices of others. People can still choose good or evil.

REIGN OF THE SERVANT KINGS

LESSON 10

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of this study, we've discovered that Jesus' central message focused on the Kingdom of God ([Mark 1:14–15](#)). Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He commissioned His followers to teach others the message of the Kingdom that Jesus had been preaching ([Matt. 28:18–20](#)), and He granted them full authority to accomplish this task. Therefore, if we want to be gospel-centric Christians, then we must be focused on the Kingdom of God. But this begins with our ability to define the Kingdom of God.

With this in mind, we asked the question, “What is the Kingdom of God?” We discovered that, in a broad sense, the Kingdom of God refers to the rule and reign of God over all of creation, but the phrase “Kingdom of God” in the Bible usually anticipates a specific time when all of creation will submit itself to the righteous and just rule and reign of God. Furthermore, in the Kingdom, the faithful people of God will rule and reign alongside Jesus, exercising His full authority, and Jesus will serve as King of Kings and Lord of Lords ([1 Tim. 6:13–16](#); [Rev. 17:14](#); [19:11–16](#)).

The Jews who hoped for the Kingdom of God believed that this would occur in a moment, on a specific day referred to as the “Day of the Lord.” This would be an apocalyptic event, but according to Jesus, the Kingdom of God does not come in a dramatic way. In His parables, Jesus taught that the Kingdom becomes a reality *before* it comes in a powerful and dramatic way. Indeed, we've concluded that the Kingdom of God is a present reality, having been inaugurated in humble beginnings with the arrival of Jesus as the King.

Jesus also challenged Jewish thinking by teaching that righteousness in the Kingdom of God is not dependent upon one's adherence to the Old Testament Law. Righteousness is not based upon a person's formal conduct but upon conduct that evidences the true nature of one's inner being. In other words, righteousness is based upon a person's character, not conduct.

Finally, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is not limited to the Jews. Rather, some Jews *will not* participate in the Kingdom, and some Gentiles *will* participate in the Kingdom. The key is not one's relationship to Abraham but one's relationship to Jesus. Anyone who has been spiritually baptized into Jesus through faith has been incorporated into the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus ([Gal. 3:16](#)). They belong to the church—those who are called-out and set apart unto God.

The church refers to the people of God who have left the Kingdom of Darkness and have become citizens of God's Kingdom. As such, the church is at the center of God's Kingdom and His redemptive plan. The church has always been at the heart of God's redemptive plan because at the heart of God's redemptive plan is the creation of a people who are devoted to Him. As such, the church is eternal, having been birthed in the mind of God before creation, and being integral to God's eternal Kingdom.

We have the incredible privilege of participating with Jesus as He expands His Kingdom and subjects His enemies to His authority. Because Jesus indwells us, we serve as mobile outposts for the Kingdom, and we expand the Kingdom by bringing the hope of the gospel wherever we go. To accomplish this, we have been commissioned and empowered by He who possesses all authority in heaven and on Earth. How we choose to accomplish this is left to us to decide. As such, there is a sense in which we are presently co-ruling with Jesus as He seeks to accomplish His primary task of expanding the Kingdom and subjecting His enemies (1 Cor. 15:24–25; Eph. 2:4–7).

LESSON

Insight:

As the people of God who have been baptized into Jesus, we are positionally seated upon His throne (Eph. 2:4–7). As such, we have been granted the opportunity to share in the authority that comes with the throne. We presently have the privilege of joining Jesus as He seeks to spread the Kingdom and bring His enemies into submission (1 Cor. 15:23–28). Moreover, God has granted us freedom to determine how best to accomplish this. In short, Jesus has chosen to partner with His people in the spreading of the gospel—the good news of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 28:18–20).

Question 1: If we are positionally seated upon Jesus’ throne, then have we become an authority unto ourselves?

Question 2: In Matthew 28:18, Jesus declared that He has been given all authority. If we are positionally seated upon Jesus’ throne, then do we also have all authority? Is our authority unlimited?

Question 3: What are some examples in Scripture of where our authority is limited?

Insight:

We have not been granted full authority over other people to bring them into submission because God Himself has not yet chosen to exercise His full authority over people to bring them into submission. Instead, we have been granted full authority to teach others about the Kingdom of God. What they choose to do with that knowledge is between them and the Lord.

Question 4: If we have been granted full authority to teach others about the Kingdom of God, then can we assume that the spiritual forces of evil will be unable to effectively resist us?

Insight:

We live in a world that fails to recognize Jesus' kingship; therefore, we should not be surprised when the world resists us. Jesus warned His disciples in **John 15:18–21** that just as the world resisted Him, so also it would resist His followers. Instead, we are to follow Jesus' example and boldly proclaim the truth in love.

Like Jesus, we are to rule as servant kings. Jesus possessed full authority as the rightful King, but He chose to allow Himself to be mistreated and misunderstood. Likewise, we share in the sufferings of Christ (**2 Cor. 1:5; Php. 3:8–11; 1 Pet. 4:13**). Like, Christ, we are called to expand the Kingdom by proclaiming the truth (**Rom. 10:14; 1 Cor. 1:21–24**) and by modelling in this present age the attributes and values of the age to come (**Matt. 5:1–16**).

Question 5: Of all the attributes that belong to the Kingdom of God, why do you think Jesus chose to highlight these attributes of the Kingdom: poor in spirit; mourning; meekness; longing for righteousness; mercy; purity of heart; peacemaking; endurance under persecution? What is the significance of each of these in today's world.

Question 6: What do you believe the impact would be if God's people collectively modelled the attributes listed in **Matthew 5:1–12**: poor in spirit; mourning; meekness; longing for righteousness; mercy; purity of heart; peacemaking; endurance under persecution?

Question 7: If these are the values of the Kingdom of God, and if we belong to the Kingdom of God, then why do we struggle to model these attributes in this age?

Insight:

Humility, peacemaking, purity, etc. are not merely target goals for us to strive toward on our personal journey of sanctification. Instead, they are critical values for anyone who seeks to rule alongside Jesus as His representative servant king. They are our weapons against spiritual darkness as we seek to expand the Kingdom of God in this age.

CONCLUSION

When we as God's people live according to Kingdom values, we stand in stark contrast to the Kingdom of Darkness. We shine like lights, exposing the unfruitful works of darkness (**Eph. 5:8–14**). Ultimately, light will always overpower darkness, and truth will always triumph over deceit. As God's mobile outposts tasked with expanding the Kingdom by allowing Jesus' light to shine through us as we make disciples of Jesus, we find ourselves on the offensive. Increasingly, as more disciples of Jesus are recruited, what began as an insurgence eventually becomes an invasion of the Kingdom of God upon the Kingdom of Darkness!

Suggested Prayer Points:

- As we exercise our authority in Christ to expand God's Kingdom, pray that we will humble ourselves to more readily discern His purposes from our preferences.
- Pray that we will be bold enough to live lives that stand in stark contrast to the Kingdom of Darkness.
- As we co-rule with Jesus, pray that we will be increasingly defined by the qualities described in **Matthew. 5:1–12**: poor in spirit; mourning; meekness; longing

for righteousness; mercy; purity of heart; peacemaking; and endurance under persecution.

Insight Answers for Questions
(Reign of the Servant Kings)

Question 1:

- **Answer:** All things will always be subject to the authority of God the Father (**1 Cor. 15:27–28**). There is never a time when God the Father does not remain sovereign. Even Jesus' kingship is derived from God the Father (**Dan. 7:13–14**).
- **Answer:** The imagery of being seated at the right hand of God the Father conveys the idea of being an authority who is also under authority (**Psa. 110:1; Eph. 1:20–23; 2:4–10**).

Question 2:

- **Answer:** No. The Bible speaks of our authority in limited terms. We have been granted authority to call ourselves children of God (**John 1:12**). We have been granted authority to appeal directly to God the Father (**Heb. 4:16**). And we have been granted authority to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God and to make disciples of Jesus (**Matt. 28:18–20; Tit. 2:11–15**). But the Bible has much to say about the limitations of our authority.

Question 3:

- **Answer:** We have not been granted authority to conform all things to our will. Everything that we do must be in keeping with the will of God (**John 14:12–14; James 4:2–3**).
- **Answer:** We have not been granted authority over governments (**Rom. 13:1–5; 1 Pet. 2:13–14**). Unless they are in contradiction to God's moral law, we are expected to submit to the laws of our country and to those who are entrusted to enforce them.
- **Answer:** We have not been granted authority over our spiritual leaders in the church (**Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 2:5–6**). We are expected to submit to the commandments and examples of the New Testament apostles and to those who are responsible for teaching and leading our local churches.
- **Answer:** We have not been granted authority over civil authority figures. Neither have civil authority figures been granted unrestricted authority. Wives are expected to submit to the authority of their husbands (**Eph. 5:22–24; Col. 3:18**), but husbands are expected to exercise their authority in love (**Eph. 5:25–33; Col. 3:19**). Children are expected to submit to the authority of their parents (**Eph. 6:1–3; Col. 3:20**), but fathers are expected to exercise their authority in conformity to God's commands (**Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21**). Slaves and bondservants are expected to submit to the authority of their masters (**Eph. 6:5–8; Col. 3:22–25**), but masters are expected to exercise their authority in conformity to God's standards (**Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1**).
- **Answer:** We have not been granted authority over our own bodies in our marital relationships (**1 Cor. 7:3–4**). We are expected to submit to the sexual desires of our spouse because, through marriage, we have been united together into one being.
- **Answer:** We have not been granted authority over other people (**Mark 10:42–45**). While some may have unique positions of authority, we are expected to appreciate that all humans share an equal inherent value. Our pedigree, ethnicity, or station does not make us more inherently valuable than any other human being.

Question 4:

- **Answer:** No. While it is true that spiritual forces of evil have no legal authority over God's people, they continue to exercise authority over those who are not the people of God (**Rom. 6:6; Col. 2:13–15**). The Bible is replete with examples of such people being used to resist the people of God.
- **Answer:** No. Some early Christians learned this lesson the hard way when they thought they could cast the name of Jesus and the Apostle Paul like a spell that would compel evil spirits to obey their command (**Acts 19:13–16**).
- **Answer:** The Apostle Paul was repeatedly resisted, assaulted, and restrained as he preached the good news of the Kingdom of God. The enemy was unable to prevent the transformative effects of the gospel in the lives of many, but they certainly did their best to prevent Paul from sharing this good news in the first place.

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