

THIS PRESENT AGE – PART D

I want to continue to look at this concept of the “**kingdom of heaven**”, or “**the kingdom of God**”. The term “**kingdom of heaven**” is used 32 times in [Matthew](#) and only one time after that in [Revelation 12:10](#). Please appreciate that we are headed toward an understanding of [Matthew 13](#), and in doing so, we want to see how [Matthew 13](#) fits in with the teaching of Christ relative to the “**kingdom of heaven**”. That is the goal. If we miss what is happening prior to and after [Matthew 13](#), then we will completely misinterpret this chapter. So, by the time that we finish this morning, we will see the **progression of events** from [Matthew 11 - Matthew 25](#) concerning the “**kingdom of heaven**”, and hopefully it will give you a much better picture of what Jesus is actually doing in those chapters and how they progress.

Now, we have to appreciate that there are a number of different ways that people view these terms. For some, the terms are synonymous with the final eternal state that will be in place after the Millennium and after the Great White Throne Judgment. From that perspective, however, the kingdom would have no real relationship to what is happening on the earth at all. It would only be a future event in a different location that really has no significance for the unbeliever until they are actually with Christ in heaven. For others, they see the terms as a purely “spiritual” entity where God is ruling in the hearts of some men, but not in any kind of earthly reign. So, once again they do not perceive the “**kingdom of heaven**”, or the “**the kingdom of God**” as being anything that is connected with the earth. It is a purely spiritual idea. Then for others, they perceive the kingdom in more political and social terms related directly to God’s rule on the earth, as well as His dealings with the nation of Israel. There are a multitude of other views where the kingdom is identified with the organized visible church in a fairly political way. In this study, we will not try and navigate through all of the different views.

So, how are we to understand how the word “**kingdom of heaven**” is actually used. The Greek word for “**kingdom**” is “*basileia*” and it literally refers to a **reign** as opposed to just a realm or a specific people. It carries the idea of power and authority rather than just a large grouping of people and is associated with a king. I.e., every kingdom is built on the premise that it has a king. So, from the concept of a kingdom having a king who is ruling comes the root meaning of power and authority, or of the actual reign of someone over their subjects. We know that in the Old Testament that God wanted to rule men in what is generally called a “theocratic” kingdom. A theocratic kingdom is one in which the rule of God is performed through someone who has been divinely chosen to speak and act on God’s behalf. I.e., if God is not actually bodily and visibly present, then He would carry out His rule through an individual. In the Millennium it is easy to see that Christ will be that Person through whom God exercises His kingdom’s rule and authority over the earth. The Scriptures are replete with this idea of Jesus coming back to both rule and reign over the entire earth.

Now, the two terms “**kingdom of heaven**”, and “**kingdom of God**” are not necessarily identical, but that they are used somewhat interchangeably and synonymously in most cases. Obviously, the context would be the determining factor. As an example, [Matthew 5:3](#) says,

Mt 5:3 (NKJV) "**Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

[Luke 6:20](#), however, speaking of the same sermon, says,

Lk 6:20 (NKJV) **Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God.**

In [Matthew 13:11](#), Jesus is answering the disciples in why He uses parables and He says this to them,

Mt 13:11 (NKJV) **He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.**

In [Mark 4:11](#), He answers the same question relative to the same parable and says,

Mk 4:11 (NKJV) **And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables,**

So we can readily see that in many cases the words are used interchangeably. For instance, and I believe this to be very important, in the Gospel of [Matthew](#) which we are looking at, the primary designation for the kingdom is the “**kingdom of heaven**”. As previously noted, [Matthew](#) is the only book of the Bible that actually uses the term, except once in [Revelation](#). In contrast, the term “**kingdom of God**” is only used five times in Matthew. For instance, [Matthew 6:33](#) says,

Mt 6:33 (NKJV) **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**

Now, we have to appreciate to whom the various gospels were being written. Matthew was being written from a purely Hebrew perspective, whereas Mark or Luke were being written to Gentiles – the Romans and the Greeks. So, each writer had a different audience in mind, and each audience had an understanding of certain elements that were unique to them. For instance, the Hebrews had a profound reverence for the name of God and were not even willing to write it or pronounce it as it was given in Scripture. So, for Matthew, it was more appropriate for him to use the term “**kingdom of heaven**” rather than “**kingdom of God**”. The term “**kingdom of heaven**” would be understood as God’s actual kingdom that was patterned after the perfections of heaven itself. On the other hand, in [Matthew](#) the “**kingdom of God**” was used to refer to the spiritual character of the kingdom. It would be patterned after God’s character, and after God’s rule and authority. So, we have to keep in mind that when we evaluate either of the terms and that to which they are referring, then that has to be done in the biblical context of each reference. In some cases, for instance, it will distinctly refer to the present form of God’s kingdom, and in other cases it will refer to a future form of God’s kingdom. In each case, the actual meaning MUST be determined by the context in which it is used.

Now, where the dilemma develops for us is in realizing that the Jews were expecting God to return in a literal theocratic kingdom, or a kingdom where He was physically on the earth and ruling over the entire earth. They were looking for the actual Messiah, God Himself, but when Jesus came the first time He simply did not meet their expectations of an earthly king. They wanted and were looking for an earthly king, and honestly Christ did not meet their qualifications for that role. This is one of the evident and primary reasons why they rejected Christ the first time and why they still reject Him until this very day. They were looking for the throne of David to be fully restored, and for Jerusalem and the nation of Israel fully returned to its previous glory. For them, the Messiah would actually usher in what we would call the Millennium.

So, we need to appreciate that when Christ came the first time that even though He announced the “**kingdom of God**” that it was completely rejected. It is interesting to me that even though Jesus repeatedly used the term “**kingdom of God**” throughout His ministry, He never once paused to define its meaning. On the same side of that coin, no one ever asked Him to define it. Why? It is because every Jew fully understood what the term “**kingdom of God**” meant. In fact, they were looking for it, anticipating it, desiring it. This idea of a “**kingdom**” was a word and a term that was very familiar to every Jew. For instance, when Jesus came, He immediately proclaimed that the “**kingdom of God**” was at hand. [Mark 1:14-15](#) says,

Mk 1:14 (NKJV) Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Listen to what Jesus told Nicodemus in [John 3:3](#),

Jn 3:3 (NKJV) Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

You can just imagine how confusing that statement was to someone like Nicodemus. He surely thought that if anyone would be able to see and recognize the “**kingdom of God**” that it would have been him – one of the great teachers of Israel. Jesus simply startled him. Obviously, Nicodemus **did not** ask Jesus to explain what He meant by the term “**kingdom of God**”. Once again, why? It is because he fully understood what it meant, as did all of the Jews. To them it was a visible, earthly kingdom with a king that ruled in majesty and complete authority – and Jesus simply did not meet their criteria for an earthly king doing that. In fact, Jesus actually told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world in [John 18:36](#),

Jn 18:36 (NKJV) Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Okay, I want to talk a little about how the “**kingdom of God**” was actually announced. Obviously, we have the Old Testament prophets, but in the time of Christ, the coming of the king was announced by John the Baptist. He was the forerunner. [Matthew 3:1-2](#) says it this way,

Mt 3:1 (NKJV) In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

John never explained the kingdom, not one time, but just simply announced that it was at hand and approaching. So, when John baptized people, it was administering spiritual cleansing through the confession of sins and baptism in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. Then we also know that Christ Himself announced the kingdom after His baptism and temptation in the wilderness when He said the following in [Matthew 4:17](#),

Mt 4:17 (NKJV) From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

When Jesus sent the twelve out to preach He said this to them in [Matthew 10:7](#),

Mt 10:7 (NKJV) And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

When the seventy were sent out, it records this in [Luke 10:9](#),

Lk 10:9 (NKJV) And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

Now, I want to provide a very important insight at this point. In all of these announcements, **they were all limited to Israel**. You must see that and understand that. These were not universal announcements, but specific announcements to the nation of Israel. Listen to how Jesus clarified this in [Matthew 10:5-7](#), and this is very important,

Mt 10:5 (NKJV) These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. ⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

[Matthew 15:24](#) says,

Mt 15:24 (NKJV) But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

So, this offer of the kingdom is initially a purely Jewish one. However, **after it is totally rejected**, the offer of the kingdom is given to the Gentiles in the new phase of God's work called the church. Ultimately, the offer that Christ made to the nation was fully contingent on their acceptance of Him. There must be a genuine repentance on their part and a recognition of both John the Baptist and Christ Himself. I am sure that at this point that someone will ask as to whether or not the theocratic promises were made to the church, and the answer would be that the church did not even exist at this time, and in reality could NOT exist until the Messiah was actually killed and “**cut off**”. That was what made the rejection of Israel complete. So, it has to be appreciated that the offer of the kingdom was made in good faith. Obviously, God in His sovereignty fully knew what the nation would do, but that does not remove the fact that God was offering the kingdom to them in good faith. I love how [Romans 3:3](#) expresses this truth speaking specifically about the Jews.

Ro 3:3 (NKJV) For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?

I.e., just because Israel was unbelieving did not in any way discredit the faithfulness and integrity of what God would do. Obviously, God the Father was not willing to give the kingdom to someone who did not actually want it. If we appreciate all of this, then it helps to better understand why Jesus wept so over Jerusalem. Everything that He was doing was to offer them the kingdom. In fact, I would add that all of His miracles were simply validating the fact that He was indeed their promised Messiah. He left no stone unturned in His efforts to reach them. [Matthew 23:37-39](#) says it this way,

Mt 23:37 (NKJV) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! ³⁸ See! Your house is left to you desolate; ³⁹ for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' "

Now, I want to keep in perspective what [Matthew](#) is all about. To me, these kinds of details are critical in being able to properly understand a passage. In [Matthew](#) there are three major components of the book. The first is that of **presenting and authenticating the Person of Christ to Israel**. Obviously, His miracles were the instrument and vehicle through which that authentication was accomplished. If He had only taught, then He would have been no different than the other teachers of Israel, but He healed, He raised people from the dead, He cured people of diseases, and He cast out demons. Do you remember what He told John the Baptist when he asked if He was the Christ? Listen to what transpired in [Matthew 11:4-5](#),

Mt 11:4 (NKJV) Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

This authentication is one of the reasons that we have the detailed genealogy of Christ in the very first verses of Matthew. It is demonstrating that He had the legal and genealogical rights to be their king. They would not have accepted just anyone. So, Matthew clearly identifies that Christ is descended from the line of David. Secondly, we find in [Matthew](#) **the acute opposition, resistance, hatred, and antagonism that was directed specifically at Christ**. It begins in [Matthew 11](#), so that when we get to [Matthew 13](#) it is clear that Christ has already been fully rejected by Israel, and He knows that and begins to give His disciples the first glimpses of the new kingdom age that is to come – the church age. Then thirdly, we see **the final rejection of Christ in His beatings, illegal trial, and crucifixion**. His ultimate authentication is seen in the resurrection, but even that was rejected by the nation.

So, what we have in [Matthew 13](#) are the **results and consequences** of Israel's rejection of their Messiah. This theme is fully developed in the parables of [Matthew 13](#). He was speaking to both conceal and reveal, and what He reveals is the **development of the kingdom of heaven as manifested in the church in view of Israel's rejection of Him as their Messiah**. Obviously, it has been a long period of time from their rejection to His Second Coming. If you read it carefully, you will see that from [Matthew 11](#) through [Matthew 16:12](#) is a record of the hateful and boiling opposition of Christ that leads to His crucifixion. So, it is in light of this opposition that he begins to outline for His disciples what His program for the kingdom will actually be and He clearly begins this in [Matthew 13](#).

As we leave [Matthew 16](#), what the Scriptures bear out is how Jesus actually begins His withdrawal from Israel. Even in something small like His cursing of the fig tree in [Matthew 21:18-19](#), we see that what He is doing in that simple act is setting aside the nation of Israel.

Mt 21:18 (NKJV) Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. ¹⁹ And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away.

In Scripture, the “**fig tree**” is often used to represent the nation of Israel, and He simply sets them aside. Now, for us, we do not normally associate a fig tree with Israel, but once again the disciples most likely understood some of the meaning of this act. If we were to study all of the other parables that Jesus gave in this last portion of His life, it would become more increasingly apparent that He was speaking the majority of the time directly to Israel because of their rejection of Him. For instance, in [Matthew 21](#) we have a parable of the landowner who planted a vineyard and the vinedressers eventually killed his

son. In [Matthew 22](#), we have the parable of the marriage feast and it reveals the attitude that Israel had in rejecting God's invitation to enter into His kingdom. No one wanted to come. Everyone had an excuse. It says in [Matthew 22:5](#),

Mt 22:5 (NKJV) But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.

So, the sequence of events becomes very clear – Israel rejects Christ and then Christ rejects Israel. He temporarily sets them aside and in [Matthew 23](#) He pronounces His scathing woes on their religious leaders and tells them of their impending judgment and an announcement of desolation that will come over Jerusalem that happened in 70AD. So, that would bring us up to His teaching on the period that we know of as the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation as taught in [Matthew 24-25](#).

If we understand it correctly, Jesus is actually giving an outline of events for the nation of Israel. He speaks about world events, but then begins to zero in on those elements that pertain specifically to Israel – like the “**abomination of desolation**”, and their being told to flee into the mountains and hide. Those all specifically relate to the nation of Israel in the events of those last seven years. Then He speaks in [Matthew 24:29-30](#) about His Second Coming,

Mt 24:29 (NKJV) "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

In [Matthew 24:38ff](#) He speaks about the judgments that will follow His Second Coming. So, if this overall perspective of the gospel of Matthew and how and why it is being written can be kept in focus, then the parables in [Matthew 25](#) can be better understood as to how they relate to these end time events. They are parables directly related to how the “**kingdom of heaven / God**” will be unfolded. Look at [Matthew 25:1](#) and [25:14](#),

Mt 25:1 (NKJV) "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Mt 25:14 (NKJV) "For *the kingdom of heaven* is like a man traveling to a far country, *who* called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

[Matthew 25:1-13](#) and [Matthew 25:14-30](#) represent God's judgment on Israel, and [Matthew 25:31-46](#) represents God's judgment on the Gentiles and clearly reveal that only the saved will enter into the Millennial kingdom.