

21. NOW AND NOT YET

What is the kingdom of God?

Is the kingdom of God present or future or both?

Is the kingdom of God a heavenly or earthly rule?

Is the kingdom of God spiritual (in the heart), religious (the church), political (world government), or about the Messiah's royal authority?

Is Jesus the Messiah ruling now or later?

These questions will be answered from a Biblical perspective.

A harmonization of kingdom verses

The 'kingdom of God' phrase and the synonymous 'kingdom of heaven' phrase are mentioned 140 times in the NT. I have thoroughly researched these verses, harmonized them, and found that they fall into three groups. A third of the verses refer by metonymy to Jesus the Messiah, the king in the kingdom of God. Another third refers to Jesus' followers, who constitute the monarchy in the kingdom of God. The final third refers to the future, the earthly Messianic kingdom, which begins when Jesus returns to Earth.

Kingdom verses that refer to Jesus

From that time on Jesus began to preach, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven has come near (Matt 4:17). There was no kingdom of God nearby, and no kingdom of God has yet appeared. If so, it would have been recorded in our history books. Jesus was, in a coded message, announcing that he was the Messiah. He commonly referred to himself as the Son of Man, a title taken from a Messianic prophecy (Dan 7:13) where Daniel saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven and being presented to the Ancient of Days. The phrases kingdom of God and kingdom of

heaven, although not found in the OT, are arguably based on Psalms 2 and 110 and Daniel's vision:

As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree: the Lord said to me: You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the Earth your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps 2:6-9)

The LORD says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (Ps 110:1-2).

He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power, all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom will never be destroyed (Dan 7:14).

This is the kingdom of God that godly Jews of the first century set their hopes upon. This is the kingdom that Jesus preached, presenting himself as the awaited Messiah.

Jesus, proclaiming the kingdom in a present context, was by metonymy referring to himself as the Messiah. Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied: The coming of the kingdom is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst (Luke 17:20-21). He was referring to himself. There was no kingdom in their midst. It doesn't even make sense to speak of a kingdom being among people. Again in Luke 11:20, Jesus said: If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. It was Jesus, the Messiah, who had come upon them, not a kingdom! So, yes, there is a 'now and not yet' aspect to the kingdom. The Messiah was present in the world but he was not yet king. He had no throne, no territory, no monarchy, and no subjects. His kingdom was still in the future.

Kingdom verses that refer to Christians

There are no less than 43 NT verses where the kingdom of God relates to the disciples. The reason is that Jesus' disciples, and eventually all those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book

of Life, will be the monarchy in the Messianic kingdom. This is what Jesus was teaching them. They are God's children and will rule with the Messiah. They will rule the Earth and do everything necessary to bring about a reign of peace, justice, and righteousness. So, yes, there is a 'now and not yet' aspect to the monarchy. As each person is redeemed and born again, he becomes a child of God and an heir with Christ of the future kingdom. This is their *present* status. When Christ returns and they are resurrected, they will enter the Messianic reign as the reigning monarchy (1 Cor 15:50). That is the future aspect.

Jesus answered: I'm telling you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit (John 3:5).

For now, when a believer is born again, he enters the Church that Jesus said he would build. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3). They possess it, they are the future monarchy; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. 'Theirs' means possession; the kingdom belongs to them. 'Theirs' can also mean identity; they constitute the monarchy; it consists of them.

Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the saints of the high places (Dan 7:27).

And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29-30).

The kingdom of God is not in heaven. It has a territory and that territory equates with all the kingdoms under heaven.

I say to you that many will come from the East and the West and take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:11-12).

This is a poor translation by NIV with little understanding of what the kingdom is about. The Greek 'sons of the kingdom' are not subjects, they are the heirs (Israel) who failed to recognize the Messiah and are cast out as unbelievers and replaced by God's elect who come from East and West.

Kingdom verses that refer to a future reign

The kingdom verses that by metonymy refer to Jesus are in a present context, and most of the verses that refer to the disciples are in a present context, but the remaining 38 passages speak of the kingdom in a future context. These verses describe the Messianic reign, the kingship in action, a reign that begins with Jesus' return to Earth.

The Messiah has made an initial appearance, the monarchy is presently being called out, but the kingdom itself is entirely future. The kingdom is earthly and the ungodly kingdoms, empires, and nations on Earth are still in power. The whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19), not under the control of God or Jesus; that awaits the millennium. We can understand why the kingdom is talked about in the present when it refers to Jesus' time on Earth or to the calling out of the Church, but it is not a logical step to conclude that the kingdom has already been established. Jesus is still only an heir of the kingdom, and we also (Rom 8:17). Jesus sat down at the right hand of God and since that time has been waiting until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet (Heb 10:13).

How belittling it is of Jesus' authority to suggest that he is ruling the Earth now. Satan is prowling around freely and evildoers have control of the governments of the world. When Jesus returns to rule, he will rule with an iron rod. Evil will be dealt with immediately and if any nation does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the Messiah, there will be no rain for them (Zech 14:17).

I'm telling you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28).

Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10). The prayer is addressed to the Father who is the source of all power and authority. The kingdom is his because he has appointed his Son, the Messiah, to be king over the whole Earth when God's will will finally be accomplished (Ps 2:6-7).

Based on this research, it is obvious that the kingdom of God is not to be thought of as God's kingdom or his sovereignty. It is the Messianic kingdom prophesied by Daniel and many other prophets,

the kingdom that godly Jews of Jesus' day were expecting, an earthly kingdom with a Jewish king ruling over Israel and all nations.

The crux of the problem

The problem with the 'now and not yet theology' is that the theologians have not distinguished between the different aspects of the kingdom: the king, his monarchy, the reign, the territory, and the subjects. The kingdom verses concern themselves with kingship, which is the basic meaning of the Greek word for 'kingdom'. The king and his monarchy, the royal family, will exercise the kingship, and the reign is the kingship in action. Entering the kingdom for believers means entering the monarchy; not entering the kingdom as a subject. A kingdom doesn't exist if there is no territory or subjects, ample proof that the Messianic kingdom does not yet exist. Even the king is absent. The confusion comes about because the kingdom of God phrase is superficially interpreted as being God's sovereignty, and due recognition has not been given to the elect in their role as monarchy. They are not subjects of the kingdom, they are heirs. They will rule the Earth but they will not live on it. As immortal resurrected beings, they will live in New Jerusalem in the heavenly realm. Since Pentecost, people from every tribe and language have been entering the kingship via the new birth. As children of God, they are heirs of the kingship.

The power and greatness of all the kingdoms on earth will be given to the people of the Supreme God. Their royal power will never end, and all rulers on earth will serve and obey them. (GNB)

Interpreters have misunderstood the pronouns here because they don't appreciate the exalted position of the holy people. It has been thirteen verses since the Messiah was referred to, too far removed for the pronouns to refer to him. The singular masculine pronoun refers to the Hebrew word 'people'.

All nations on Earth during the millennium will serve and obey the saints who will rule the Earth for the Messiah (Rev 5:10). The saints are entering the kingship now through being born again (Mat 21:31, 23:13. John 3:5, Col 1:12-13). Entering the Messianic reign after the return of the Messiah is a completion of their glorification (Mat 7:21, 25:34, 1 Cor 15:50, 1 Tim 4:18, 2 Pet 1:11).

N. T. Wright said according to Jewish hope: If Pilate was still governing Judea, then the kingdom of God had not come. If the temple was not rebuilt, then the kingdom had not yet come. If the Messiah had not arrived, then the kingdom had not yet come. If Israel was not observing the Torah properly (however one might define that), then the kingdom had not yet come. If the pagans were not defeated and/or flocking to Zion for instruction, then the kingdom had not yet come. (Jesus and the Victory of God (1996) p. 204).

Amillennialists are in a bind

Most amillennialists hold the ‘now and not yet view’ and they end up having no kingdom at all. There is no kingdom of God verse that suggests that the kingdom exists in the hearts of those who submit to Christ. Good News Bible and an earlier NIV version of Luke 17:21 read: The kingdom of God is within you, but most versions translate among you or in your midst. The NIV text was changed in a later edition.

The kingdom is never spiritualized in this way. It is political and territorial, an earthly rule characterized by world peace, righteousness, and the knowledge of the Lord. His rule will extend from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the Earth (Zech 9:10). The kingdom was never about the human heart. It is about the whole world, the total population, a public demonstration of what just rule is about, and the vindication of God’s people who will rule the Earth with royal power for a thousand years. All nations will come to Jerusalem to worship. Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16). God will be given his rightful place and his temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations (Isa 56:7, Mark 11:17).

Amillennialists claim there is no kingdom after Christ’s return, and the apostle Paul taught that there can be no kingdom before Christ’s return because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50). Christians are heirs of the kingdom and will not inherit it until they are resurrected. A Platonic mindset does not allow amillennialists to believe that New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven to Earth and that God will make his home with man rather than man making his home with God in heaven. The

new heaven and new Earth, as initially prophesied by Isaiah, was always going to be about life on this Earth. I will create new heavens and a new Earth ... for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. ... Never again will there be an old man who does not live out his years. ... They will build houses ... The wolf and the lamb will feed together (Isa 65:17-25).

The kingdom of God has a definite beginning when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah (Rev 11:15-17). The verb is aorist tense and coincides with the blowing of the seventh trumpet and the second coming: You have taken your great power and *have begun to reign*.

There is also a definite end when Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:24-25). As for the length of the reign, six times in Revelation 20 a thousand years is mentioned. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ... They will be priests of God and Christ and will reign with him a thousand years.

It is sad that the traditional churches that came out of the Reformation, and the Catholic church itself, have never reformed their eschatology. They more or less ignore the biblical teaching of a millennial reign on Earth by the Messiah and the glorious hope of the saints after their resurrection. Their hope is set in heaven, which we know nothing about and which is not the ideal home for people with supernatural resurrected bodies. That Middle-Ages' eschatology is stale. Platonic influence stifles faith, making it hard for people to believe in specific, supernatural events happening on Earth. There is only a vague hope of heaven and a final judgment. It is difficult for them to believe in a literal return of Jesus in the clouds of heaven, in a resurrection of the dead, in Jesus setting foot on the Mount of Olives, in the remnant of Israel being converted en masse, in New Jerusalem coming down from heaven and settling above Israel, in the saints living in that heavenly city and from there ruling the Earth, in the unregenerate nations of the world making pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, in the world and nature being renewed in every aspect, in a Messianic reign where there is no more war or corrupt government.

The saints' glorification as a royal priesthood

Truly the 'not yet' will be amazing as God has promised in his word. It will put the 'now' to shame because what we have now is war, famines, plagues, corruption, immorality, mental illness, and despair. The only bright light is that people from every nation, tribe, people, and language are continually turning to the Lord, being saved, and entering the monarchy of the kingdom that is not yet. Christian workers, like Paul, are opening their eyes, turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus (Acts 26:18), and have been qualified to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light (Col 1:12).

Born-again Christians indwelt by the Spirit of God will be the monarchy in the Messianic kingdom. The Messiah will give them authority over the nations (Rev 2:26), and they will rule with Christ. They are children of God, members of the royal family. They will rule the world during the Millennium from New Jerusalem which is in the heavenly realm and its glory is visible in the sky. Their resurrection bodies give them instant access to anywhere in the physical or spiritual realms. They are not restricted by time or space, they have passed from death into eternal life. They have bodies like their Lord's body, who after his resurrection passed freely from the heavenly realm to Earth and from Earth back to the heavenly realm.

Man ruling the Earth was God's original plan

God's initial plan was for man to rule the world. Adam was told to fill the Earth and subdue it (Gen 1:26-28, Ps 8:6). Quoting Psalm 8 the author of Hebrews says, it is not to angels that God has subjected the world to come, but mankind (Heb 2:5-6) as Daniel later made very clear (Dan 7:22, 27). The mystery of the kingdom was the truth, unrevealed to the prophets but revealed by Jesus in the parables (Mark 4:10-11), that Messiah's monarchy would be made up of people of all nations, heirs together with the faithful of Israel (Rom 16:25-26, Eph 3:4-6).

When in Jesus' life does the kingdom begin?

The male child, Jesus, the future king of the Jews (Matt 2:2), was born in Bethlehem in Judah. The kingdom did not begin with his birth, and he was not king over any region during his time on Earth.

The kingdom didn't begin when he won a victory over Satan when tempted. The kingdom didn't begin at the crucifixion but it was a necessary precursor, as his substitutionary death made possible the redemption of the monarchy. The kingdom is all about the monarchy and the glorification of the elect portion of mankind. The kingdom didn't begin at the resurrection, but the resurrected Jesus is called the first fruits of all who will be resurrected on the day of his return, and his resurrection is confirmation that his followers will be resurrected. The kingdom did not begin at Pentecost, but the Church did, and the true Church is the monarchy in the future kingdom. Not only that, the Church is God's human family who will live and reign with him throughout eternity (Rev 22:3-5). Compared to a mustard seed, the Church is growing from a small start to a great multitude of believers. None of these events produced a territory for the Messiah to rule over, and none of them produced a population for him to rule over. The kingdom will begin when Jesus returns.

Daniel's visions of the kingdom of God

As interpreted by Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar's statue represented world empire whose last expression was struck and smashed by a rock that was not quarried by human hands. The statue was shattered and became like chaff on a threshing floor. The wind swept it away *without leaving a trace*, just as on judgment day heaven and Earth will flee from God's presence *without leaving a trace* (Rev 20:11). The rock that struck the statue grew to be a mountain that covered the whole Earth (Dan 2:34-35). A son of man (the Son of Man), the Jewish Messiah, was led into God's presence and was given authority, glory, and sovereign power, so that people of every language would worship him. His dominion would be everlasting, his kingdom would never be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14). Jesus said: All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:18-19). Jesus received his kingship from the Father and commanded his disciples to go and gather his monarchy which would rule with him. When the monarchy is complete (Rom 11:25), the Messiah will save the remnant of Israel alive at that time (Rom 11:26-27). The Messiah will at last have his territory (the whole world), a population to rule over (the survivors of the Great Tribulation), and a resurrected monarchy to rule for him from

New Jerusalem (the Church), and a newly saved nation of Israel (his nation on Earth), fulfilling the Messianic prophecies of many OT prophets.

Israel's role in the 'not yet' kingdom

Israel forfeited their right to the kingdom. They were 'the sons of the kingdom' (Matt 8:12), the original heirs, but they rejected the Messiah when he came. Now the good seed that the Son of man sows are the new sons of the kingdom (Matt 13:38). The high priests, the leading teachers, the Pharisees, and the general populace all had a part to play in handing Jesus over to be crucified. Jesus was the stone the builders rejected. Therefore, he said: I tell you that the kingdom will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit (Matt 21:43). They should have been the monarchy, but now they are part of the population. Of course, the rot set in at least 600 years beforehand when God's glory left the temple in 586 BC as seen by Ezekiel (ch. 10), and his glory will return to a new temple, as seen by Ezekiel (ch. 43).

There are believing Jews in the Church from all ages who will enjoy their intended destiny. As for the unbelievers, they are rejected, but God cannot give Israel up. He made covenants with them and made promises to them about the future. The whole nation will be saved after Jesus' return (Rom 11:25-32). God will pour out his Spirit upon them, and they will be saved (Ezek 36:27-28, 37:21-23, Joel 2:28-29), but too late for the resurrection and the monarchy. They will be God's special nation on Earth, a temple will be built, and Israel will control the worship (Ezk 40-48). God's holy city, Jerusalem on Earth, will be glorified (Isa 60), and Israel will have a special role to play during the Millennium. Only the Church will live in New Jerusalem. Only they will rule the Earth, and only they will live with God and the Lamb and see his face.

I am forever thankful to God and my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that I am a child of God and heir of the monarchy, and I look forward with anticipation to the millennial reign. What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived – the things God has prepared for those who love him – these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit (1 Cor 2:9-10).

Does the Bible teach that Jesus is king now?

Psalm 2 and 132:11-14 are clear prophecies that one day the Messiah will reign from Mount Zion. Luke tells of Jesus' birth and that God would give him the throne of his ancestor David and he would reign over Jacob's descendants forever. But it is only in Rev 11:15 and 19:6, after his return, that it is said that Jesus has begun to reign.