

A Kingdom for Both Jews and Gentiles

JESUS told his followers to pray for God's kingdom on earth, "*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10). God's Kingdom does not now embrace the earth as it does heaven. This is because humankind does not obey God as the angels do.

In the past God ruled over some individuals who were willing to obey Him. He also set up a national kingdom in Israel with which He was very patient until its disobedience became incurable. This kingdom collapsed because God's people rejected Him, as we can read in 2 Chronicles 36:15–17.

The National Response

What actually happened? First, the Jews were called to be obedient to God, and so occupy the honoured status of being His people (Matthew 3:1–3; Mark 1:14–15).

Second, as a nation they refused. While some repented there were many who rejected the will of God (Luke 7:30). It was the same even after Jesus' resurrection. While many Jews believed, many more did not. Paul repeatedly had to leave them and turn to non-Jews,

the Gentiles (Acts 13:42–48). He later mourned his nation's rejection of the gospel (Romans 9:1–5, 10:1–3).

Third, although they still have a part to play in the purpose of God, they lost their privileged position. Nothing could be clearer than Jesus own words to them: "*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it*" (Matthew 21:43).

God did not leave Himself without a people. There was a 'nation bearing fruit' to take their place. It was not now a single race, but individuals of every nation – including Jews – who willingly receive the way of God in humble obedience.



Individual Response

People who repent as they hear the gospel of the kingdom become kingdom members now. This new generation and class of people is made up of those who accept Jesus as king, and, repenting of their sins, obey him in baptism. They are taught, then they confess, after which they are baptized by being covered in water. Each such individual makes a personal commitment (Acts 8:12).

They are then “*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*” (1 Peter 2:9). These words echo those spoken by God to the Jews at the start of their existence as a nation (Exodus 19:6). While this aspect of the kingdom is very real, it has no land at present; its members are strangers and pilgrims in the earth (1 Peter 2:11); and it has no army (John 18:36).

Servants of the king Jesus Christ must behave soberly (2 Timothy 2:24). The kingdom’s laws are simultaneously gentle and stern. They are very gentle because the law of Christ offers infinite forgiveness to the penitent (Matthew 12:31; 1 John 1:9). They are stern because, no matter how much the Lord will forgive, he wants us to strive for perfection (Matthew 5:48). It is what we think which matters, at least as much as what we do (Matthew 5:21–28). We must not forget that wilful sin must be accounted for to God (Hebrews 10:26–31).

Each of us has been given the freedom either to obey God or to disobey Him. As many of Jesus’ parables of the kingdom

show, there are all kinds of people to whom the gospel of the kingdom is preached (Matthew 13:3–23).

At present this pre-kingdom state includes both good and bad, and only in the future will the bad be discarded (Matthew 13:24–30, 38–43). Some of its citizens are watchful, and some are lazy (Matthew 25. 1–13). In the king’s absence some of his servants serve him diligently, while others waste their opportunities (Luke 19:11–27).

But, above all, this aspect of the kingdom of God is only temporary. None of the promises about the establishment of David’s throne are fulfilled by it. The constant message is that something better is to come. The prophets and the parable in Luke 19 point clearly to a fuller expression of the kingdom at a future time.

The Future

The Jews thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately (Luke 19:11) and they wanted Jesus to be king there and then. He used a parable to show that, though it will indeed come with all the power they expected, it would not be yet. His servants must serve him faithfully during his long absence, so that when he returns in his power they shall have their reward (Luke 19:11–27).

Jesus will come back again: of this there can be no doubt. Even before he went away he spoke of coming back (Matthew 25:31). His disciples heard this again from the angels at his ascension (Acts 1:11). They

taught the same message as they set about preaching. Jesus Christ must come back in order to fulfil what the prophets had spoken (Acts 3:20–21). The Gentiles were taught the same message (Acts 17:31).

This hope of a king over the earth is not in vain. The world is not to be left to its own devices for ever but will one day be compelled to accept the rule of God. The world has waited for 2000 years since Jesus Christ was born, and all the signs are that it may not have to wait for much longer.

The coming of the Christ to set up the kingdom over all the earth is to be in a time of trouble such as never was (Daniel 12:1). But the coming is also to be at a time when there is a new awakening in the Jewish nation. The Jews will be returning from their long scattering abroad and establishing themselves in Israel (Luke 21:24).



The State of Israel established in 1948

We have seen this happen in the past century for the first time in nearly 2000 years. Israel rejected Jesus, so it lost its place as a privileged nation, becoming subject to the judgements of God in its sufferings and dispersion. But the scattering was only to be for a time and Paul, who mourns the unbelief of fellow Jews, speaks of a time when God will restore them (Romans 11:11–28).

Jews will be in Israel to see their king when he returns (Zechariah 12:10). It will not be pleasant for them to see the evidence of the sins of their ancestors, but this will be the critical test: Israel will have to decide whether or not it will now be faithful and repentant. Its future will depend on its decision. Continued rebellion will be punished, while submission will lead to a special place among the mortal people of the world (Ezekiel 11:17–21).

A Decision

But right now, we are each individually being invited to accept Jesus as king and try to live as citizens of his kingdom, waiting for him to return. When he comes back, those who have had this opportunity will be judged, and those found faithful blessed with immortality in his kingdom (Matthew 25:31, 46).

God's kingdom is at the core of the gospel message and it is our choice right now whether we are to be part of it.

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