

# The Kingdom of God



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 11:2; Luke 1:32, 33; 18:16–30; Luke 17:23, 24; Rev. 21:1–3; Luke 21:34–36.*

**Memory Text:** “They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God” (*Luke 13:29, NKJV*).

The kingdom of God is a major theme and a significant priority in the teachings of Jesus. The phrase occurs nearly fifty times in Matthew, 16 times in Mark, about forty times in Luke, and 3 times in John. Wherever it appears—be it in the Lord's Prayer, or in the Sermon on the Mount, or in Jesus' other preaching and parables—the kingdom of God is an expression of what God had done in history for the human race as He deals with the problem of sin and brings the great controversy with Satan to an ultimate and decisive end. The kingdom of God is unlike any kingdom the world has ever known, and that's because it's not a worldly kingdom.

“The kingdom of God comes not with outward show. It comes through the gentleness of the inspiration of His word, through the inward working of His Spirit, the fellowship of the soul with Him who is its life. The greatest manifestation of its power is seen in human nature brought to the perfection of the character of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 36.

This week we'll focus on this theme, especially as it appears in Luke.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 13.

## Characteristics of the Kingdom of God: Part 1

The Gospels are replete with references to the kingdom of God, all cumulatively testifying that a new order has been inaugurated in and through Jesus.

**What** does Luke 11:2 say about the kingdom of God? Whose kingdom is it, and why is that so important?

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To say that this kingdom is God's is not just saying the obvious but is rather affirming that the kingdom of God is neither a philosophic notion nor an ethical edifice. It is not a social gospel proclaiming bread and water for the hungry or equality and justice for the politically oppressed. It transcends all human goodness and moral action and finds its locus in the sovereign activity of God in the incarnate Son, who came preaching the good news of the kingdom (*Luke 4:42–44, Matt. 4:23–25*).

**What** does Luke 1:32, 33 teach about who inaugurated the kingdom of God and what its final result will be?

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The passage is of utmost importance for two reasons: first, the Messiah anticipated in the Old Testament is none other than Jesus, "the Son of the Highest"; second, "Of his kingdom there will be no end." This means that, through His incarnation, death, and resurrection, Jesus vanquished Satan's challenge to God's sovereignty and established for eternity God's kingdom. "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (*Rev. 11:15, NKJV*). In the clash between Christ and Satan, Satan claimed victory after the fall of Adam and Eve. But the mission of Jesus proved the falsity of Satan's claims; He defeated Satan at every turn, and with His death and resurrection Christ has assured the entire cosmos that the kingdom of God has arrived.

**How can we live in a way that reflects the reality of the kingdom of God? Most important, how can we reflect that reality in our own lives? What should be different about how we, as citizens of God's kingdom, live now?**

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## Characteristics of the Kingdom of God: Part 2

**What** do the following texts teach us about what citizenship in the kingdom of God is about?

*Luke 18:16–30* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Luke 12:31–33* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Luke 9:59–62* \_\_\_\_\_

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Entry into the kingdom of God is not dependent on one's status or position, or one's riches or the lack thereof. Luke, along with other Gospel writers, points out that one must come to Jesus with an attitude of uncompromised surrender, absolute dependency, and childlike trust; these are traits of those who have entered the kingdom of God. They must be willing to give up everything, if need be; for whatever they would not want to give up would be something that, in a sense, not only competes with Jesus but, in fact, wins. Jesus, and His claim on our life, on *every* aspect of our life, takes top priority. This makes sense, because, after all, it's only through Him that we exist to begin with. Thus, of course, He should have our complete allegiance.

Read again Luke 18:29, 30. What is Jesus saying to us, and what is He promising? *To have to leave parents, spouse, even children for the kingdom of God?* That's a demanding commitment, is it not? Jesus is not saying that these actions are required of all believers but that if one were called to leave these things for the sake of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God would be worth it.

**Dwell on Jesus' words about letting the dead bury the dead. What important truth is He expressing here about not making excuses to keep from following Him when the call comes, no matter how valid those excuses might seem?**

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## The Kingdom of God: Already, Not Yet

Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God. In His first public proclamation at Nazareth (*Luke 4:16–21*), Jesus affirmed that, through Him that day, Isaiah’s Messianic prophecy of the kingdom and its redeeming ministry had been inaugurated.

Luke records another saying that attests the kingdom’s present reality. Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom would come, Jesus answered them that the “‘kingdom of God is within you’ ” (*Luke 17:21, NKJV*). Other translations suggest that the kingdom is in your midst. That is to say, with the arrival of Jesus, the kingdom has already come, with its components to include healing the sick (*Luke 9:11*), preaching the gospel (*Luke 4:16–19*), forgiving sins (*Luke 7:48–50; 19:9, 10*), and crushing the forces of evil (*Luke 11:20*). Thus, Jesus made the kingdom a present reality within the individual, transforming the person to be like Him. The kingdom of God is also seen amid the community of believers, a revelation of righteousness and salvation. This present aspect is also known as “the kingdom of God’s grace [that] is now being established, as day by day hearts that have been full of sin and rebellion yield to the sovereignty of His love.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 108.

While the “already” aspect has settled the finality of the kingdom—that is, the defeat of sin and Satan and Jesus’ victory in the great controversy—the “not yet” aspect looks forward to the physical end of evil and the establishment of the new earth: “The full establishment of the kingdom of His glory will not take place until the second coming of Christ to this world.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 108.

**What** do these texts teach about the kingdom of God at the end of the age? *Luke 17:23, 24; 21:5–36*.

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Our world, and the state of our world—the turmoil, sorrow, and trouble in it—certainly reflect the words that Jesus expressed here. Though some argue that the pain and suffering in this world mean God doesn’t exist, we could reply that, given what Jesus warned us about almost two thousand years ago, the state of our world helps prove not only God’s existence but the truth of the Bible itself. (If the world were paradise now, Jesus’ words would be false.) Only at the end will the kingdom of God, in all its fullness, be established. Until then, we have to endure.

## The Kingdom and the Second Coming of Christ

When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, He spoke of two certainties: (1) God's activity through Christ in history to save humanity from sin and (2) God's closure of history by restoring the saved to His original plan—to live with Him forever in the earth made new (*Rev. 21:1–3*). The first, as already noted, has arrived in the mission and ministry of Christ. In Him we are already in the kingdom of grace (*Eph. 1:4–9*). The second part, the gathering of the saved in the kingdom of glory, is the future hope that those in Christ await (*Eph. 1:10, Titus 2:13*). Jesus and the rest of the New Testament link that historical moment when the faithful will inherit the kingdom of glory to the second coming of Christ.

The second coming of Christ is the final culmination of the good news that Jesus came to proclaim when He came the first time. The same Jesus who defeated sin and Satan on Calvary is soon to return to begin the process that will eradicate evil and purify this earth from the tragedy that Satan inflicted on God's creation.

**Read** Luke 21:34–36. In your own words, summarize the basic message. As you do, look at your life and ask yourself how these words apply to you. What do you need to do in order to make sure that you are following what Jesus tells us here?

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As we await the return of Jesus, we are called to “‘watch . . . and pray always that you may be counted worthy . . . to stand before the Son of Man’ ” (*vs. 36, NKJV*).

Those who have experienced the kingdom of grace must wait, watch, and pray for the kingdom of glory. Between the one and the other, between the already and the not yet, the believers are to be occupied with ministry and mission, with living and hoping, with nurture and witness. The anticipation of the Second Coming demands the sanctification of our lives now and here.

## Witnesses

**Read** Acts 1:1–8. What important truths about the kingdom of God are being expressed here?

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The kingdom of God was foremost in the mind of Luke as he wrote a sequel to his Gospel, in the form of a brief history of the early church. In the opening lines of that historical account, the book of Acts, Luke states three fundamental truths regarding the kingdom of God.

**First, be sure that Jesus will come again.** For 40 days between His resurrection and ascension, the Lord continued to teach what He had taught the disciples before His crucifixion: “things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (*Acts 1:3, NKJV*). The mighty events of the Cross and the Resurrection had not changed anything in the teaching of Jesus in regard to the kingdom; if anything, for 40 days the risen Jesus continued to impress on the disciples the reality of the kingdom.

**Second, be waiting for Jesus to come again in God’s own time.** After His resurrection, Jesus’ disciples asked a serious and anxious question: “ ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ ” (*vs. 6, NKJV*). Jesus did not answer the question but corrected the disciples’ perspective: God must always be God; to probe His mind, to predict the preciseness of His plans, to penetrate His secrets is not the task of flesh and blood. He knows when the kingdom of glory should come, and He will bring it to pass in His own time (*Acts 1:7, Matt. 24:36*), just as “when the fullness of the time had come” (*Gal. 4:4*) He sent His Son to inaugurate the kingdom of grace.

**Third, be witnesses to the gospel of Jesus.** Christ redirected the disciples from speculation about what is not known—when the kingdom of glory will come—to what is known and must be done. The time of the Second Coming is not revealed, but we are called upon to wait for that glorious day and to “occupy” till then (*Luke 19:13*). This means that we should be involved in taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to “ ‘the end of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*). That is our responsibility—not in our own strength but by the power of the Holy Spirit, promised to be poured out on all those who shall be witnesses to what they have seen and heard (*vs. 4–8*).

**These faithful followers of Jesus still had some big misconceptions about the nature of Christ’s work. And yet, the Lord was using them anyway. What message might there be for us about not needing to fully understand everything in order to still be used by God?**

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**Further Study:** “Of the poor in spirit Jesus says, ‘Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ This kingdom is not, as Christ’s hearers had hoped, a temporal and earthly dominion. Christ was opening to men the spiritual kingdom of His love, His grace, His righteousness. The ensign of the Messiah’s reign is distinguished by the likeness of the Son of man. His subjects are the poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted for righteousness’ sake. The kingdom of heaven is theirs.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 8.

“We are now in God’s workshop. Many of us are rough stones from the quarry. But as we lay hold upon the truth of God, its influence affects us. It elevates us and removes from us every imperfection and sin, of whatever nature. Thus we are prepared to see the King in His beauty and finally to unite with the pure and heavenly angels in the kingdom of glory. It is here that this work is to be accomplished for us, here that our bodies and spirits are to be fitted for immortality.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 355, 356.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Physicist Steven Weinberg, talking about the cosmos, famously (or infamously) wrote: “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.” His words made quite a stir, and he eventually tried to soften what he said. Some, though, didn’t see any reason for the controversy about the universe not having a point. “Why should it have a point?” asked Harvard astronomer Martha Geller about the universe. “What point? It’s just a physical system, what point is there? I’ve always been puzzled by that statement.” *The universe, just a system, and a pointless one at that?* As a Christian awaiting the second coming of Jesus and the full and complete establishment of the kingdom of God, how would you respond to the ideas behind these statements?
- ② Every generation of Christians has expected Jesus to return in their time, and some pastors and evangelists have set specific dates. But each has failed. What is wrong with time setting?

## Fighting With Shadows: Part 1

ABBA, MONGOLIA

Abba, a young man living in northern Mongolia, felt powerless to change the downward spiral of his life. Then his friend introduced him to God. Here he shares his personal testimony.

“Before I became a Christian, I lived a really worldly life. I drank; I smoked; and I stole things. I never thought about whether what I did was good or bad; it was just part of me. I did it naturally.

“One time my friends and I were drinking, and I got drunk long before they did. I lost consciousness, and when I awoke, I realized I was alone. I stumbled out of the house in search of my friends. I found them in one of my friend’s houses. ‘Why did you leave me?’ I demanded angrily.

“ ‘You were asleep!’ one said. ‘We couldn’t awaken you.’ They gave me another drink. I felt myself falling backwards, and everything turned black.

“I awoke in the police station, naked and cold. My arm was bloody, and my back was sore. I didn’t know what had happened. The police officer told me that I had been arrested for disturbing the peace. He said that I had been shouting and threatening people, and that I had broken several people’s windows with my fist. That explained the bloody arm. A man with the police officer said I had banged on his door and threatened him. I did not remember any of this.

“The police officer gave me my clothes, and I dressed. But my shoes were missing. When I asked for my shoes, he told me I had not been wearing shoes when I was arrested.

“A woman came into the police station to file a complaint against me. She said that I had broken windows in her house. I apologized and told her I didn’t know I had done this. I wanted to see the broken windows for myself, so the police officer took me to her home. Under one broken window lay one of my shoes. Then I went to the other house with broken windows, and found my other shoe. I knew that I was guilty. The owner of the house said that I had threatened to kill everyone in the house. Someone else told me that I had knocked on a door and when I saw my own shadow reflected in the glass, I started fighting with it. When a man came out to investigate the noise, I started fighting with him. He escaped and called the police. When the police officer came, I started fighting with him as well. It seemed I was listening to stories of a man possessed with a devil.

“I paid my fine and agreed to replace the broken windows. I even promised that I would never drink again. But three days later I was drunk. It seemed that I could not stop drinking. I realized the difficulties I was making for my mother, with whom I lived. I worked, but instead of giving her money for food, I bought alcohol.”

*To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.*