

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?

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?

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?

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 _____

Luke 12:31–33 _____

Luke 9:59–62 _____

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 child-like 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?

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*.

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?

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?

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?’ ” (*v.s. 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 (*vss. 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?

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.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Luke 13:29*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize that the kingdom of God is at the core of the teachings of Jesus.

Feel: Embrace the conviction that the kingdom of God demands a total transformation in life.

Do: Participate in and prepare for the kingdom.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus and the Kingdom of God

A What did Jesus teach regarding the kingdom of God? How and why is the kingdom message central to the teachings of Jesus?

B What is the nature of the kingdom of God? How is it related to the present and future life?

C How did Jesus show the universal nature of the kingdom?

II. Feel: The Kingdom of God and Transformation

A The kingdom of God is more than a theory; it is divine power to transform human life. How? What is the difference between the old and the new life?

B What kind of commitments does the kingdom of God make on you?

C How do the ethics of the kingdom affect you?

III. Do: The Kingdom of God Invites Preparation and Participation.

A How does one come into the kingdom? What should we do to receive the full blessings of the kingdom?

B What should we do as full members of the kingdom? What should we give up? What should we embrace?

C Since the kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future hope, how should we relate to the two aspects?

► **Summary:** The kingdom of God has come in the Person of Christ, who dealt with sin once and for all in the sacrifice of Himself. We already live in that kingdom of grace, waiting for the manifestation of the kingdom of glory to bring the final end to sin and Satan.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Luke 11:2–4*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The prayer “ ‘Your kingdom come’ ” (*Matt. 6:10, NKJV*) must remind us of three realities. First, the kingdom is God’s, not ours. Too often humans, even well-meaning Christian scholars, tend to equate the kingdom with some sort of social, economic, and ethical transformation. But the biblical use of the “kingdom of God” emphasizes God’s singular authority, sovereignty, and rulership over all creation. There is none like Him. Second, Jesus ushered in this kingdom as one of grace through which we obtain forgiveness from sin, victory over Satan, and inheritance of eternal life. Third, while we live in the kingdom of grace we look forward to the kingdom of glory, where we shall live in the very presence of God (*Rev. 11:15, 21:1–3*).

Just for Teachers: The kingdom of God is the heartbeat of Christ’s teachings. Everything He was, taught, and did was geared to showcase to the world that in Him the kingdom of God had arrived and through Him all humanity can find salvation from sin and restoration to God. As you lead out in the lesson today, focus on the Christ-centeredness of the kingdom.

Question for Discussion: The Lord’s Prayer begins with “ ‘Your kingdom come’ ” and ends with “ ‘For Yours is the kingdom’ ” (*Matt. 6:10, 13, NKJV*). How do these two petitions relate to each other?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: He came when Rome was marching across the globe, establishing a ruthless empire. He came when the Hebrew people were hoping for the overthrow of the Roman yoke in Palestine to restore the throne of David. He, Jesus, burst upon the scene and altered history with the words “ ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand’ ” (*Mark 1:15, NKJV*). God’s prophetic clock had struck its hour, and, in the “fullness of the time” (*Gal. 4:4, NKJV*), Jesus entered human history with a divine mandate: “ ‘I must preach the kingdom of God . . . because for this purpose I have been sent’ ” (*Luke 4:43, NKJV*). Jesus had no hesitation and no vacillation about the primary purpose of His incarnation and ministry: to establish God’s kingdom and “ ‘to seek and to save that which was lost’ ” (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). What is the nature of this kingdom? What is meant by the kingdom existing now

and not yet? What is the future expectation of the kingdom? Discuss these three aspects of the kingdom of God.

Bible Commentary

I. The Kingdom of God: Its Nature (Review Luke 11:14–20 with your class.)

What is the nature of the kingdom of God, and what will it bring about?

A. Victory in the great controversy. The kingdom of God is a divine breakthrough in human history in the Person of Jesus to defeat Satan in the cosmic conflict of the ages, thus vindicating the sovereignty of God. When the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul (Luke 11:14–20; compare Matt. 12:28, 29), Jesus makes a formidable statement that His casting out demons is indeed a sign that “surely the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20, NKJV). Jesus has won the battle with Satan in the wilderness; and now in His ministry He continues to free people from the grasp of the enemy, until Satan is finally crushed at the cross. The kingdom of God has certainly entered history.

B. The kingdom of God is, in fact, connected with God’s plan of salvation. The plan provides for the forgiveness of sin (Luke 5:20, 21), for involvement in the ministry of healing (Luke 9:2, 11), for the caring of the poor and the needy (Luke 18:22), and for the ultimate defeat of Satan as the conclusion of the great controversy (Luke 10:18). Thus, the kingdom of God is far from being a myth; it is a dynamic, God-centered, present reality (vs. 9–11; 16:16, 17; 17:21; Matt. 12:28; Mark 1:14) and an eschatological hope of glory (Luke 13:28, 29; Luke 21; 22:14–18, 29, 30; Matt. 13:42, 43; 16:27, 28; Matthew 24; 25:34; Mark 9:1; 13). The establishment of God’s kingdom results in the destruction of all hostile powers, the last of which are death and Satan (1 Cor. 15:23–28).

C. Citizenship in God’s kingdom does not permit any compromise or competition to Jesus’ being the door to the kingdom. A passionate loyalty to Him and His kingdom must be preferred and chosen over the most urgent earthly obligation. Hence, Jesus commands us to seek the kingdom of God first (Luke 12:31); make it your preaching (Luke 9:2); mark it as your prayer (Luke 11:2); and live it as your life (Luke 18:29).

Consider This: Read Luke 4:17–21 and Isaiah 61:1, 2. What did Jesus mean when He said that Isaiah’s Messianic prediction (Isa. 61:1, 2) was fulfilled in His preaching and healing activities that began in Nazareth that day? What does the kingdom of God in Luke 4:43 mean within the context of Luke 4?

II. The Kingdom of God—Now and Not Yet (Review Luke 17:21, 21:25–28, 22:14–18 with your class.)

How is the kingdom of God simultaneously both a present reality and a future fulfillment?

A. The kingdom now. That the kingdom has both a present reality and a future fulfillment is clear from such passages as Luke 17:21, 21:34–36, and John 14:1–3. Jesus is more than an announcer of the kingdom: He is the Content, the Conveyor, and the Confirmer of that kingdom. Through His Person and His ministry, God’s reign is established forever. Through Him alone we enter the kingdom.

This kingdom that Christ has established in our midst is often described as the kingdom of grace. God’s grace has initiated a new order, a new way of life, a new relationship in which the grace of God triumphs over sin, the righteousness of God brings about a new person, and the Spirit of God establishes a common brotherhood and fellowship.

B. The kingdom to come. The present kingdom of grace anticipates the future kingdom of glory. The future aspect of God’s kingdom is illustrated in the Lord’s Prayer: “Your kingdom come.” If the kingdom were wholly limited only to the present, the prayer would lose much of its force and meaning, especially in view of the fact that Jesus told the disciples that He Himself would bring the kingdom when He returned with power (*Mark 9:1; compare with Matt. 16:28*).

Consider This: “The kingdom of God’s grace is now being established, as day by day hearts that have been full of sin and rebellion yield to the sovereignty of His love. But the full establishment of the kingdom of His glory will not take place until the second coming of Christ to this world.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 108.

III. The Kingdom of God and the Future (*Review Luke 17:24 and Luke 21 with your class.*)

When will the kingdom of glory take place, and how should we live our lives in anticipation of this great event?

A. Certainty of the future. The Gospels teach that just as the kingdom of grace came into the world by the direct intervention of God in human history through the Incarnation, so will the future kingdom of glory come through a similar act in the return of Jesus in history, this time not through incarnation but the glorious, personal return of Jesus. Witness the eschatological discourses of Christ (*Luke 21, Matthew 24, 25, Mark 13*) in reply to the disciples’ question “ ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ ” (*Matt. 24:3, NKJV*).

The answer depicts both the condition of the earth and the certainty of the return of Jesus. The present age will continue with its social, political, moral, and religious disorder. The conflict between good and evil will rage in all its intensity and diversity, even as the gospel of the kingdom is preached in all the world (*Matt. 24:20, 21*), and the world order is confronted with the redemptive

message and the impending collapse of the age.

B. Living in anticipation. The time of the Second Coming is not known, but the event is certain. Christ's coming " 'will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other' " (*Luke 17:24, NIV*). The interim between now and the Second Coming is to be used by the disciples in a life of preparedness (*Matt. 25:1–13*) and proclamation (*Matt. 28:19, 20*), in order that the eschatological kingdom does not take them unaware.

Discussion Question: "The hope of Christ's appearing is a large hope, a far-reaching hope. It is the hope of seeing the King in His beauty, and of being made like Him."—Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 59. As believers in the second coming of Christ, how should this large and far-reaching hope affect our lives? Mention some practical steps.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: As Jesus was leaving Jericho to go to Jerusalem, speculation was rife among the crowd, including the disciples, that "the kingdom of God would appear immediately" (*Luke 19:11, NKJV*). To correct this erroneous concept, Jesus told the parable of the nobleman and the ten servants. After reading the parable (vss. 11–27), answer the following questions.

Application Questions:

- ❶ Verse 12: What does it mean " 'to receive for himself a kingdom and to return' " (*NKJV*)?
- ❷ Verse 13: " ' "Do business till I come" ' " (*NKJV*). Jesus is saying that there is a time interval between His going and His returning with the kingdom, and in this interim we are to do His work. What work? What is/are the talent(s) you have received? How are you faring in your business for Him?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: "To His servants Christ commits 'His goods'—something to be put to use for Him. . . . Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 326, 327.

Ask your class members to jot down on a piece of paper the strongest spiritual gift God has given them. Encourage them to write how far they have used that gift for the extension of God's kingdom on earth. If they have not, ask them to consider in what specific way they might use their gifts to engage in God's work.