

The Kingdom of God is in Your Midst

Luke 17:20-21 states that one day when Jesus was asked when the kingdom was coming, He replied with, “The kingdom of God is in your midst.” This important answer has confused many people. Anyone who has read the Bible from Genesis through Revelation has learned that the word “kingdom” occurs many times. Unless the reader is aware that the word “kingdom” has two different meanings, great misunderstandings will occur. A careful study of the word translated as “kingdom” reveals there are actually two different “kingdoms” mentioned in Scripture.

Those who are familiar with the English language are aware that the word “bill” has different meanings. The word “bill” can refer to the beak of a duck, the muzzle of a platypus, the point of an anchor, a dollar bill, a legal document, a list of charges for services rendered, and the front part of a baseball cap, to name a few. In the Bible, the term “kingdom” can refer to God’s universal kingdom or His spiritual kingdom. Therefore, in order to understand Jesus’ statement that “The kingdom of God is in your midst,” we will begin with an explanation of the two meanings of “kingdom.” We will follow with the study in Luke 17:20-21.

GOD’S UNIVERSAL KINGDOM. Psalm 10:16 is the first passage I want to introduce about the universal kingdom of God.

The LORD is King forever and ever;

Nations have
perished from
His land.
Psalm 10:16
(NASB)

It tells us that the Lord our God is King forever. Not only is our God eternal, but He is also the eternal, sovereign King of everything that He has created.

Consequently, it is clear that His dominion includes all the nations of the earth. His kingdom includes every person in every nation on earth. His kingdom also includes everything in the invisible world, such as the angels and whatever else may be in heaven. Since we are also told that He is “King forever and ever,” we are to understand that His kingdom existed before

the nations and it will exist after the nations are destroyed (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:11).

Psalm 145:12-13 repeats the message that God’s kingdom exists forever. This is God’s universal kingdom.

To make known
to the sons of men
Your mighty acts
And the glory of
the majesty of
Your kingdom.
Your kingdom
is an everlasting
kingdom,
And Your
dominion endures
throughout all
generations.
Psalm 145:12-13
(NASB)

Kingdom of God Is In Your Midst



Psalm 29:10 says God is the Lord who sits as king forever. The universal kingdom includes everything that God has created in the visible and invisible worlds: angels, humans, and the rest of the creation. The psalm says this kingdom will exist forever. That is, God’s universal kingdom has existed and will always exist. Even in the future eternal state, God will rule over the

new heaven and new earth described in Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21-22. The unbelievers who will be sent to the lake of fire will continue to exist forever. They will be part of God's universal kingdom, but not His spiritual kingdom (discussed in the next section)! They will be part of God's universal kingdom because He created them, and they will continue to exist forever.

The universal kingdom will include God's spiritual kingdom which includes all believers who are on earth and in heaven (Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21-22). The universal kingdom will also include all the unbelievers on earth and those living in hell, which is also called the lake of fire. They are not part of the spiritual kingdom and they will continue to exist in suffering forever because they rejected Christ and rebelled against God (Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:10, 14-15).

GOD'S INVISIBLE SPIRITUAL KINGDOM. God's spiritual kingdom is also mentioned in the Old Testament. One of the

most obvious passages is 2 Kings 2:1, where the prophet Elijah was taken to heaven. He never suffered the pain of physical death.

And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2 Kings 2:1 (NASB)

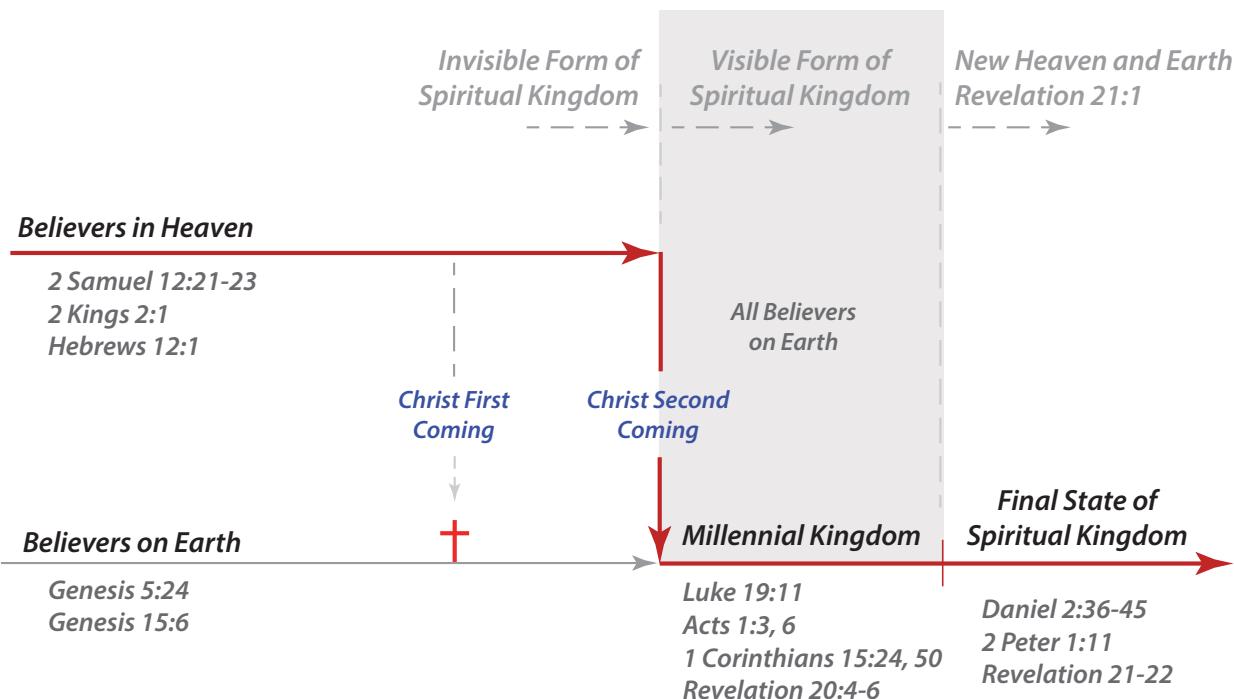
Another important passage is 2 Samuel 12:21-23 where David's son died. David said,

Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me. 2 Samuel 12:23 (NASB)

David was referring to meeting his dead son in heaven some day.

Maybe the most significant passages about Old Testament

Father's Spiritual Kingdom



believers is found in Hebrews 12:1 where we are told there is a cloud of witnesses in heaven surrounding us. When the writer of Hebrews says this, he was referring to the saints who had already died in the Old Testament, which he had already named in Hebrews 11. The invisible spiritual kingdom is the place where the saints or believers of all the ages currently exist.

INVISIBLE SPIRITUAL KINGDOM BECOMES VISIBLE.

Both Matthew 24:29-31 and Revelation 19:11-20:6 teach that at the second coming of Christ, the kingdoms of the world will be defeated and a millennial or one-thousand year kingdom will be established. Jesus will be the King ruling over this kingdom. This kingdom is not a new kingdom. It is a continuation of the spiritual kingdom, only then in a visible form. Initially, the citizens of this kingdom will only be believers. That is Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:31-46.

Matthew 25 records different parables and teachings by Christ about this millennial kingdom, but verses 31-46 describe the Goat and Sheep Judgment which will

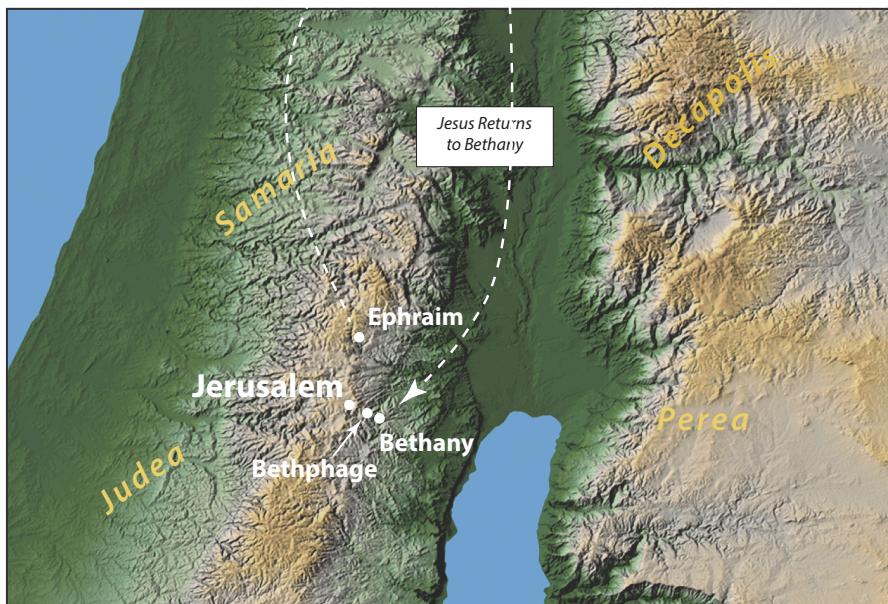
occur between the second coming of Christ and the millennial kingdom starts. This judgment must not be confused with the White Throne Judgment described in Revelation 20:11. The Goat and Sheep Judgment determines who enters the millennial kingdom when it first begins. Jesus teaches us that only believers will enter this spiritual kingdom (verses 31-34). Also, notice that Matthew 25:34 says the Father planned this kingdom before the foundation of the world. Verse 32 says that all the surviving people from the Battle of Armageddon of the nations of the world will stand before the Father. Then He will separate the sheep, or believers, from the goats, or unbelievers (v. 32-33). Then in verse 34 we are told the Father only allows the believers into His kingdom. This is the visible form of the

spiritual kingdom.

Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Matthew 25:34 (NASB)

1 Corinthians 15:22-24 teaches that at the end of the millennial kingdom Christ will hand this visible form of the spiritual kingdom over to the Father. Then it will take on another form—an eternal and final form or the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21:1). In theology this is also called the eternal state (Revelation 21-22).

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM.



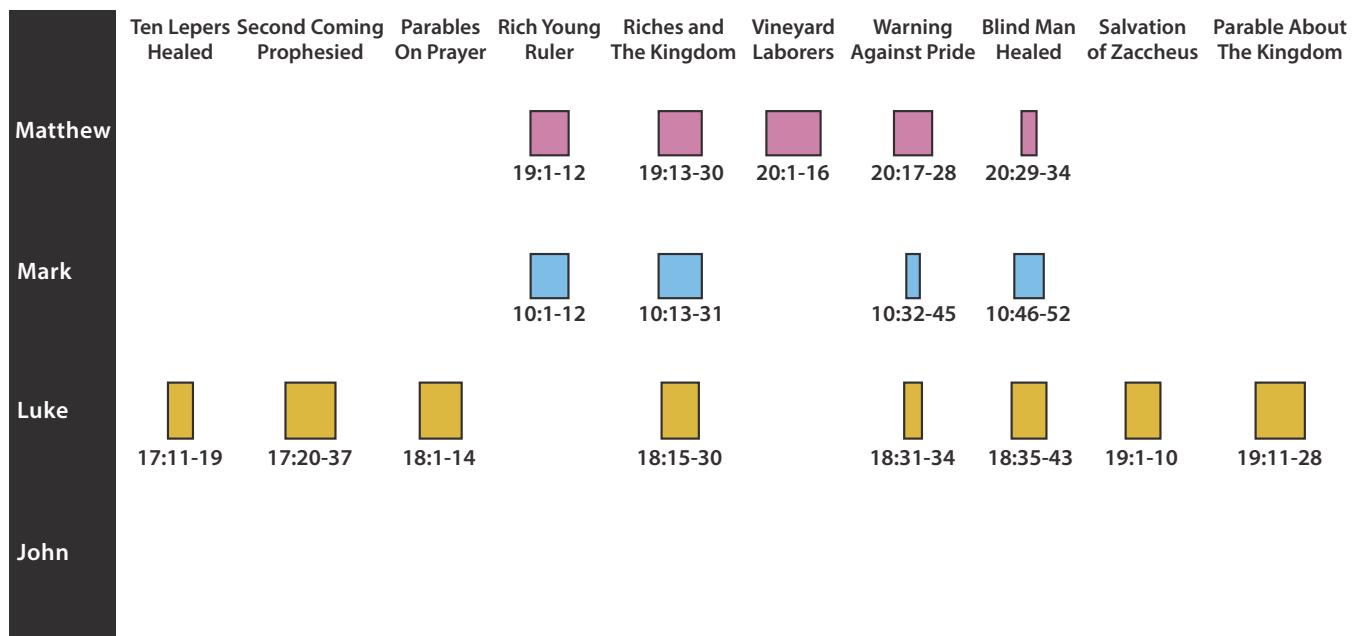
Now for a short overview of the visible spiritual kingdom, also called the millennial kingdom. Throughout the Old Testament, God repeatedly prophesied of a future kingdom that would exist forever (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17; 2 Samuel 7:16-17; Micah 5:2).

Maybe the clearest Old Testament prophecy about this future kingdom is found in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. It states that God promised to give King David a kingdom that would exist forever. The prophecy says that at some point in the future one of king David's descendants, the Messiah (Jesus Christ) will rule as king forever. This kingdom is a continuation of the Father's invisible spiritual kingdom, but it will exist in a different form in the future for one thousand years (Revelation 20:4). This *visible form of the spiritual kingdom will completely dominate the world after the second coming of Christ and will exist on this fallen earth for one thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6)*.

Now we have several questions. The first question is, “Why is the visible spiritual kingdom not the universal kingdom?”

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One answer is that both Daniel 2:45 and Daniel 7:13-14, 26-27 refer to this eternal form of this spiritual kingdom as a future event. That means the future visible form of the spiritual kingdom cannot refer to the universal kingdom since it already exists; nor is it the invisible form of God's spiritual kingdom since it already exists too!

Since Jesus has urged us to pray that the Father's kingdom *would come* in Matthew 6:10, it is obvious that He was not referring to the existing universal kingdom or the invisible form of the existing spiritual kingdom. Jesus was referring to something new and future.

The second question is, "Why will the future millennial kingdom be a continuation of the current invisible spiritual kingdom?" First, Christ will rule as king during the millennial kingdom and it will contain holy angels and the saints of all the ages (Daniel 12:1, 13; Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Corinthians 6:3; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 20:6). Second, the millennial kingdom over which Jesus will rule will not include the evil angels, or any of the unbelievers that are still living at *the end of the tribulation*. These unbelievers will be sent to hell and never dwell in the kingdom. Third, Isaiah 65:17-25 describes

this kingdom as a wonderful place where people will live long, still births will not exist, safety, abundance, and peace will exist among the animal kingdom (Isaiah 65:17-25).

Fourth, Joel 3:11; Zechariah 14:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:13 and Revelation 19:11-19 teach that all the believers in heaven will return to earth at Jesus' second coming. Matthew 25:31-40 and Revelation 20:4-6 indicate that all believers will enter this millennial kingdom. Revelation 20:5 calls this the first resurrection. The next or second resurrection is for unbelievers and when they are resurrected they are sent to the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). Therefore, the millennial kingdom is the visible form of the spiritual kingdom.

ETERNAL FORM OF THE SPIRITUAL KINGDOM. After the millennial kingdom or the visible form of the invisible kingdom ends, Revelation 21:1-7 teaches the final form of the spiritual kingdom occurs. This is called the eternal state. Only believers will enter into this eternal final form of the spiritual kingdom. Revelation 21:24-26 states that saints from every nation of the old earth will live in this eternal, spiritual kingdom. This is the final form of the spiritual kingdom. Now we must not think that the universal kingdom has ceased to exist.

It will still exist since God the Father is still ruler of everything, including the spiritual kingdom and the lake of fire which will contain the unbelievers who rejected Jesus Christ.

PHARISEES ASK ABOUT THE KINGDOM. We have provided much background information about the spiritual kingdom because our study in Luke 17:20-21 is about this kingdom. It is important for a proper understanding of this passage. Luke 17:20-21 reads as follows,

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.” Luke 17:20-21 (NASB)

Before this event occurred, Jesus had just healed ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19). Of the ten lepers who were healed, only one believed in Jesus (Luke 17:19). We pointed out in the last study that when Jesus told the leper, “Your faith has made you well,” the Greek word Jesus used for “well” was *sōzo*, which means “to save.” That is, the one leper who returned to thank Jesus had become a believer in Him. Only one leper was saved from his sins. He had been physically healed and spiritually saved.

Verse 20 tells us that the Pharisees had been asking Jesus questions about the kingdom of God. When the Pharisees thought about the kingdom of God, they thought about the future millennial kingdom in a non-spiritual sense. They did not understand that the kingdom was the visible spiritual kingdom over which Christ will reign. They viewed the kingdom as the national kingdom of Israel which would rule the world. They completely misunderstood the nature of the kingdom. They also believed that only Jews and converted Gentiles would live in the kingdom. Jesus had already warned them that some would not be living in that kingdom (Matthew 8:11-12). It is obvious from the Gospels they did not believe Jesus.

Now we do not know why the Pharisees asked Jesus about the kingdom. Maybe they had heard Jesus tell the leper that he was saved. Since the Pharisees would have connected being saved with having eternal life, that may have caused them to think about the future. Whatever the reason, the Pharisees asked Jesus about the future kingdom. For we are told,

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming . . . Luke 17:20 (NASB)

KINGDOM IS IN YOUR MIDST. Then Jesus answered,

... The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst. Luke 17:20-21 (NASB)

The Greek word that Jesus used for the word “observed” is *parateresis*. The word referred to astronomical observation. Therefore, it had the sense of “closely watching.” This means Jesus said the coming of the kingdom of God could not be determined by carefully watching for external signs. There would not be astronomical signs.

Therefore, we must ask, “About what kingdom was Jesus speaking?” Jesus’ reply seems to contradict the fact that Jesus will teach later that signs will occur before the second coming of Christ, which will occur just before the visible spiritual kingdom. Why did Jesus say this? The answer is that He referred to the invisible kingdom of God when He answered the Pharisees. The invisible kingdom already existed. There are two reasons why this is the correct conclusion.

The first reason is that when Jesus said the kingdom of God was “in your midst,” He literally said, “in you.” He used two Greek words, “*entos su*.” The Greek word *su* means you. The Greek word *entos* is sometimes translated as “within,” such as in the passage in Matthew 23:26. But a more accurate sense of the word is “within a time period,”¹ or “among you.”² Howard Marshall states,

Jesus is speaking of the presence of the kingdom of God among men . . .³

That is, the correct understanding is that Jesus was not referring to the kingdom of God being inside the Pharisees. It was among them. There were individual men and women who were

1. Moulton and Milligan. Vocabulary of the The Greek Testament. Hendrickson Publishers. 1997. p. 218.

2. Howard Marshall. Commentary on Luke. New International Greek Testament Commentary. The Paternoster Press, Eerdmans Publishing. 1992. p.655.

3. Ibid.

believers, who would go to heaven. In that sense the kingdom was among them.

The second reason to believe that Jesus was referring to the invisible kingdom of God is that in Matthew 24:1-31 Jesus described a series of signs that would occur before His second coming. Then in Matthew 25, especially in Matthew 25:31-46, He described the kingdom of God. That is, the second coming of Christ occurs before the kingdom. In Luke 17:22-37, He prophesied that the world would be given to pleasure and personal indulgence prior to His coming which will occur before the visible spiritual kingdom. This is the kingdom the Pharisees were asking about, but they did not realize that they would never enter into that visible spiritual kingdom. They were expecting a non-spiritual kingdom that dominated its enemies by the use of a military with weapons. Jesus' point was that there are no signs for the coming of the invisible spiritual kingdom because it already existed, but there will be signs before the arrival of the visible form of the spiritual kingdom.

Because of these two reasons, we understand that the kingdom Jesus was speaking about was the invisible spiritual kingdom. There are no signs that will occur that the kingdom is arriving since it already exists. It has existed since the time of Adam and Eve.

CONCLUSION. The Pharisees did not understand that the kingdom they were looking for was actually a spiritual kingdom that could only be entered into by a work of the Holy Spirit. That was Jesus' message to Nicodemus (John 3:4-6). The Holy Spirit had to change their hearts.

Jesus had already illustrated that their hearts needed to be changed in the parable of the Sower of the Seed. Here is Luke 8:12 and 15.

Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved . . . But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. Luke 8:12, 15 (NASB)

Jesus' point was that with the heart (the mind) a person believes in Christ and is saved. So, the devil works to prevent

people from believing in Him. For with the heart, a person believes and is saved. So, Jesus informed them that the kingdom was already present among them. They did not know the kingdom was already present because of their unbelieving hearts.

So when the Pharisees asked about the coming of the Father's kingdom, Jesus accurately explained that the kingdom they wanted already existed. He ignored the future version of the kingdom. But the future version is what He discussed with the disciples next (Luke 17:22-37).

Did you know that the invisible spiritual kingdom is already present and you can enter it by believing in Jesus? Jesus has said that He did not come to save the righteous but sinners.

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Luke 5:32 (NASB)

He called sinners to repent of their sins. He called sinners to believe in Him for the forgiveness of their sins.

Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins. Acts 10:43

Only the humble will believe in Him and want their sins forgiven. Only the humble will want their lives changed. Only the humble will submit to God and seek His forgiveness. As Jesus will say in the next study, only the serious will submit. Those who believe in Jesus will want their sins forgiven. How about you? Do you understand the kingdom of God is among you?