

The Kingdom of Heaven

Related: [The Ten Similitudes of the Kingdom](#)

The Kingdom of Heaven is a *dispensational* term only found in Matthew's gospel, while the [Kingdom of God](#) is a broader *moral* term found throughout the New Testament. The Kingdom of Heaven is not heaven itself; rather it is a kingdom on earth, but the seat of its authority is in the heavens (Psa. 103:19), "*the heavens*" referring to the heavenly places. It is composed of those who recognize that "*the heavens do rule*" (Dan. 4:26), although some only profess it without reality. To put it simply, *the kingdom of heaven is that sphere on earth that recognizes the authority of the rejected Christ*, even if it is only in profession. The kingdom of heaven is a *mediatorial* kingdom, which Christ rules as man. It is viewed as a stewardship committed to Him, compared to every other human kingdom. It will one day cease from the condition of being a stewardship, after all has been perfectly subjected to the glorified Son of man (1 Cor. 15:24; Psa. 8). The kingdom will then continue, after it has been delivered up, as the *moral* kingdom referred to more generally as the Kingdom of God.

In prophecy. The Old Testament scriptures looked on, past all the failure of human administrations, whether the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, or the great Gentile monarchies, to a coming Kingdom of Heaven. God brought Israel up out of Egypt, and established them in the land of Canaan. He placed His own name in the city of Jerusalem, which meant His authority was uniquely there. God gave them a great king named David, who defeated all the enemies of Israel. God promised David that his throne would be established forever. David had a son named Solomon, who it says "*sat on the throne of Jehovah*" in Jerusalem. But that government deteriorated quickly. The successive line of kings brought idolatry into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Under the leadership of these kings, the moral state of Israel and Judah grew worse and worse until the northern kingdom of Israel was taken captive by Assyria. The southern kingdom of Judah declined also. Finally, a king named Manasseh sat on the throne. He was more wicked than any other king, and God said to Judah "that's it, I've decided to take away my authority from Jerusalem". He promised to "*wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish... and deliver them into the hand of their enemies*" (2 Kings 21:13-14). One hundred years later, the armies of Babylon came against Judah. Many were taken captive, and the Temple was destroyed.

God took the government away from Israel, and gave it into the hand of the Gentiles. This began a period we know as "*the times of the Gentiles*" (Luke 21:24). During this period, the Gentiles hold the balance of power in the earth. The first great king to hold this power was

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. In Daniel chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. Daniel the prophet gives Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of what he had seen. The great statue in Nebuchadnezzar's vision had multiple layers; a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. The statue represents a timeline of the great Gentile powers. Daniel tells us the names of the first three empires: the head of gold is Babylon, the chest and arms of silver is the Medes and Persians, the belly and thighs of brass is Greece, and the fourth empire is not named but is described in detail. We can compare with other scriptures and clearly identify this fourth empire as Rome. Daniel tells us what the characteristics of those Gentile powers would be (Dan. 3 - 6). Would they turn out any better than Israel? No. These Gentile powers would also force idolatry on their subjects. They would persecute the faithful. They would use the power and riches God would give them to glorify themselves. This is the same pattern we see with everything committed to the First Man.

The "feet" of the statue have not taken place yet... that empire is still future. In the dream, a great stone comes flying into the scene and smashes the statue on its feet. The whole thing is shattered to bits and pieces, and blown away *"like the chaff of the summer threshing floor"*. The stone grows into a huge mountain that fills the whole earth. Daniel says that this mountain is a kingdom that will be set up by *"the God of heaven"* which *"shall never be destroyed."* This will be a kingdom whose capital is not Babylon, nor Susa, nor Athens, nor Rome... but heaven itself! It will be a kingdom on earth, but the seat of its authority will be in heaven. This is what is referred to as *"the kingdom of heaven"*.

Daniel speaks of it again in Dan. 7:13-14: *"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."* (See also Dan. 2:44; Gen. 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:12-13). This is not some abstract philosophical idea, but a real kingdom in manifested power. Many long years passed with silence as to this kingdom, but then...

At hand. John the Baptist came preaching that the Kingdom was "at hand" or about to be set up! The kingdom did not properly begin until the ascension of Christ, yet John was proclaiming it to be just around the corner. Jesus and His disciples preached the same

message: *“the kingdom of heaven is at hand”*. Jesus sent His disciples throughout the land of Israel with that message (Matt. 10). Note: one might wonder about the expression *“the kingdom of God is at hand”* (Mark 1:15). We must remember that the kingdom of God is a *moral* sphere, not a *literal* kingdom like the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, this expression shows us that not only was a *new dispensation* about to unfold, but there was a *new moral order* which would be required by God for all those who would live in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why many of the practical and moral exhortations in Matthew with regard to the kingdom of heaven are also found in the other three gospels with regard to the kingdom of God!

Postponed. Did Israel receive their king? No, they rejected Him. The rejection of the King is documented in ch.11-12 of Matthew’s gospel. Several striking changes occur at this juncture in Matthew. First, the Lord discontinues the phrase *“the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* which hints that some delay had come in. Second, in ch.13 He begins to teach in parables (a new teaching style) about what the kingdom of heaven would be like.

The [similitudes of the Kingdom](#) are ten parables that all begin with the phrase *“the kingdom of heaven is like unto...”*. The strange thing about these similitudes is that they describe a kingdom in which evil is allowed to continue, and the wicked are not immediately judged. How does that fit with the Old Testament prophecies of the Millennial kingdom where evil is judged every morning? It is an apparent contradiction! The answer is that the Lord is teaching that the Millennial kingdom had been *postponed* because He had been rejected! He didn’t specify for how long it would be postponed, but we believe it to be approximately 2000 years. The postponement of the kingdom really has the effect of sifting out unbelief. Faith alone can patiently wait upon the word of the Lord.

In mystery. The Millennium was postponed, and yet the kingdom did *begin* when the Lord ascended. The kingdom following the Lord’s ascension was different from the Millennium because it was not *manifested* in outward power. Instead it was set up in a “mystery” form for those who have the faith to see it. A handy way to understand the two phases of the kingdom of heaven is; first the kingdom “in mystery” going on presently, and then the kingdom “in manifestation” which is still to come. The Old Testament prophecies tell us about the manifestation phase, and the similitudes tell us about the mystery phase. The “mystery phase” is not a mystery to us, because we are the disciples of the kingdom who have faith; *“because unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 13:11). The ten similitudes are called “mysteries” because they explain to us those perplexing questions about the time during which the rejected King is absent from earth. Questions like: “why is evil allowed to continue?”, and “is God still working during this time?”, etc. During this time, God has suspended His direct dealings with the world,

although He is still in control providentially. In the meantime, the tares are left to grow among the wheat, the leaven continues to spread in three measures of meal, and the great tree of professing Christianity continues to grow. True subjects of the kingdom are encouraged to wait patiently until the time of the end, when Christ will come, and the mixture will be sorted out. Another word connected with the present phase of the kingdom is "patience", because evil is allowed to continue apparently unjudged, and Christ is denied His rightful place on earth. John speaks of "*the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*" (Rev. 1:9). We are looking forward *patiently* to the manifestation phase, when Christ will have His rightful place!

The King. The kingdom of heaven has a king; the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Kingdom of God, it is *God* who is the king. Why is Christ the King of the kingdom of heaven? Because the kingdom of heaven is a dispensational term, and it has to do with the fulfillment of God's purpose concerning Christ. However, the disciples of the kingdom are *never* found in scripture addressing Christ as *king*. Why is that? The title of "king" does not fully describe our relationship with Christ. Instead a different title is used; "Lord". The subjects of a king obey him because of his political authority over them. But the title "Lord" implies not only political authority, but authority over body, soul, and spirit. Therefore, while Christ is the King over the kingdom of heaven, we are not to address Him as merely our King, but as our Lord and our Savior. Our relationship with Him is better described as Lord-and-disciple rather than King-and-subject.

The Kingdom received.

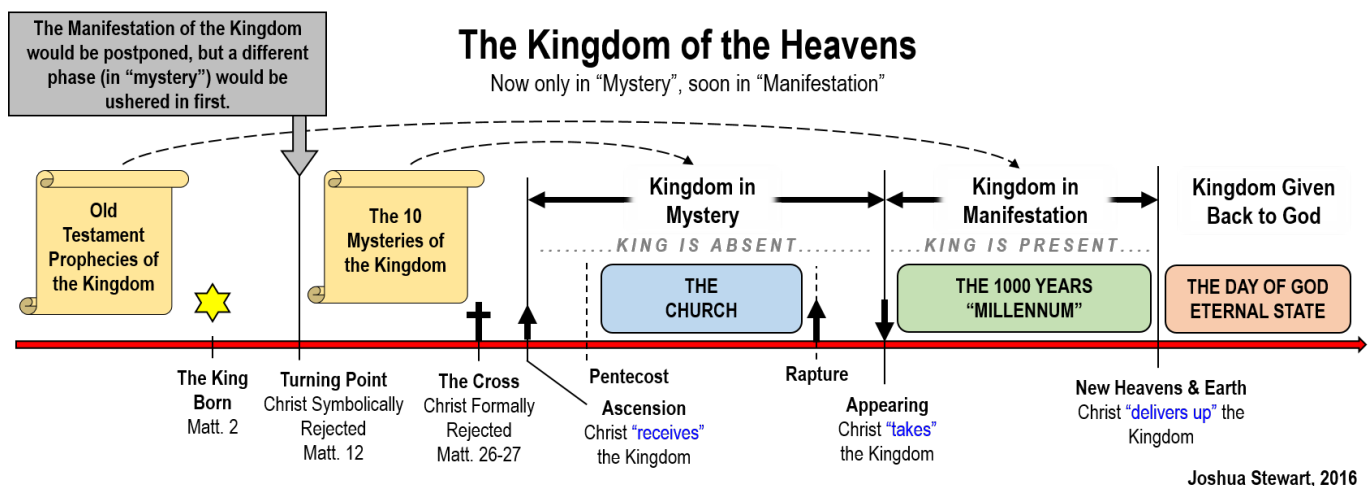
The kingdom began when Christ ascended to heaven. It couldn't have started before that, because He had not yet taken His place in heaven. It says "*A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom...*" (Luke 19:12). He will take the kingdom in power at the appearing (Rev. 11:15), and He will deliver up the kingdom to God at the end of the 1000 years (1 Cor. 15:24). To summarize: Christ *received* the kingdom at His ascension, He will *take* it at His appearing, and He will *deliver* it up at the end of time.

Note: this is helpful in understanding how the Church is a completely different thing than the Kingdom. The Church began ten days *after* the ascension when the Holy Spirit was sent down (Acts 2), and will be taken up at the rapture some seven years *before* the appearing. The Church is not only a different order of things than the kingdom, but also has different start and end dates!

In manifestation. The glorious day will come when Christ returns in power and glory with

all His heavenly saints. He will establish His Kingdom that will last for one thousand years. This Millennial kingdom is referred to in 1 Thess. 2:12 as “his kingdom and *glory*” as opposed to “the kingdom and *patience*” (Rev. 1:9). In Matt. 13 we find that this kingdom is divided into two compartments; a *heavenly* side and an *earthly* side. The heavenly side is called “the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 8:11; 13:43) and the earthly side is called “His kingdom” or “the kingdom of the Son of Man” (Matt. 13:41; 16:28, 24:30, 25:31).

Delivered up. After the Millennium, when Christ will have put down all His enemies and reigned supreme for one thousand years, He will deliver up the Kingdom to the Father “that God might be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:14-28). This will be the final demonstration of the perfection of the Second Man, who will succeed in all that the First Man has failed in. When it is delivered up, the kingdom will cease from the *mediatorial* condition of being a stewardship, but it will continue throughout eternity as a *moral* kingdom referred to more generally as the Kingdom of God. This is when Christ will lay down the conferred authority, and resuming the normal position of humanity, meanwhile never ceasing to be the divine, eternal Son of God.



I have used the following chart to demonstrate the postponement of the manifestation phase, and the bringing in of the mystery phase.

<https://media.realclearbible.com/Kingdom-of-Heaven-Animation.mp4>

Charts: [Kingdom Chart Collapsed](#), [Kingdom Chart Expanded](#), [Ten Similitudes](#)
Recording: [Address by Josh Stewart, The Kingdom of Heaven, Michigan 2017](#)

References:

- *The Kingdom in Manifestation*. Dan. 2:44; Dan. 7:27; Matt. 3:2; Matt. 4:17; Matt. 5:3, 10, 19, 20; Matt. 7:21; Matt. 8:11; Matt. 10:7; 2 Pet. 1:11; Rev 12:10
- *The Kingdom in Mystery*. Matt. 11:11, Matt. 12; Matt. 3:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:1, 3, 4, 23; Matt. 19:14, 23; Matt. 20:1; Matt. 22:2; Matt. 23:13; Matt. 25:1