

# The Kingdom

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Created in the image of God, but losing that image and being expelled from Paradise meant that each person would be born in sin, would sin, and would merit eternal damnation. Thus SIN became everyone's problem. But the solution of that problem lay beyond the moral capabilities of sinful mankind.

The solution had to come from the LORD God. He announced the coming of a Hero, the Headcrusher, who would bruise the head of the serpent, Genesis 3:15, who had deceived Adam and Eve and brought death and damnation upon the human race. The Headcrusher would come, but the details of how He would solve the problem of sin were not revealed.

Centuries passed. Sin polluted the entire human race being hardened in unbelief, but Noah and his family found grace in the eyes of the LORD. The LORD destroyed the human race, but spared Noah and his family. After the flood, the LORD through Noah foretold that the Headcrusher would come from Shem, but again no specifics as to how the problem of sin would be solved were given. Once again sin engulfed the human race and brought down upon it the LORD's judgment upon Babel. Twice the promise of the Headcrusher was almost lost in the sea of sin-polluted mankind.

Then the LORD changed His tactics. He chose one man, Abraham, promised to make of him a great nation, promised him a homeland, and assured him that through a descendant of his ***"all the families of the earth would be blessed"*** (Genesis 12:3). The promised Savior of sin-polluted mankind would come from the descendants of Abraham, but what He would do to save was not revealed.

Centuries passed. The promise of the Savior of mankind was passed from Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob and then to Judah. The descendants of these men became a nation in Egypt, an enslaved nation liberated by the LORD through Moses. He led them to Mt. Sinai where He made a covenant with them. In that covenant the LORD revealed how the promised Savior would save from sin. The method had already been indicated the night of the first Passover: *Saved by the blood of the Lamb* or salvation by substitution.

*Saved by the blood of a substitute!* That was the divinely instituted method by which the Promised One would bring salvation to all. The LORD inculcated that saving truth at Sinai. In the Book of Leviticus, the LORD instructed His people through Moses that every man bringing a burnt offering should put his hand on the head of the burnt offering so that it would be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him (Lev. 1:1-5).

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron was instructed to ***"lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man"*** (Leviticus 16:21).

Salvation by the shedding of the blood of a substitute. That was the Gospel. Isaiah proclaimed it in these words, ***"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed"*** (Isaiah 53:4-5).

But salvation through a divine Lamb faded from the consciousness of the people. What stirred their souls was the prophecy of the coming of a King whom they were hoping would free them from the tyranny of Rome and restore the glory of Israel as it was in the days of David and Solomon. The kingdom they longed for was not spiritual but carnal - a kingdom like the kingdoms of this world.

The Angel Gabriel informed Mary that the Son she would bear would ***"be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end"*** (Luke 1:32-33). That is not the promise of an earthly kingdom but rather a spiritual kingdom called the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom was and remains spiritual! The Holy Spirit gave this job description of the Baptist's ministry: ***"He will turn many of the children of Israel of the Lord their God. He will also go before Him is the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"*** (Luke 1:16-17). He was to be ***"the voice of one"***

***crying in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:3).***

Consistent with these words of prophecy the message of John was a call to repentance, a call for fruits of repentance, a warning of judgment to come, and the assurance of the Coming One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:1-12). No mention of an earthly kingdom; no call to arms!

So also with Jesus. His message was the same as that of John: ***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven (not of earth) is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).*** When Jesus sent out the Twelve, He instructed them to proclaim, ***“The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:7).*** When Jesus sent out the Seventy, He instructed them to heal the sick and to assure the people, ***“The kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10:9).*** When the Seventy returned and reported that even the demons were subject to them, Jesus exclaimed, ***“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:17).*** Jesus curbed the enthusiasm of the Seventy by exhorting them to rejoice that their names were written in heaven. Personal salvation, not the establishment of an earthly kingdom, is the goal of the kingdom of heaven. Nonetheless, the casting out of demons revealed the true nature of the kingdom and the fact that it had come (Luke 11:20).

The characteristics of the kingdom reveal its spiritual nature. The Pharisees had heard repeatedly the Lord’s message that the kingdom had come, but they saw nothing that indicated to them the coming of the kingdom. They asked Jesus when the kingdom would come. Jesus responded, ***“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21).*** The rise and fall of earthly kingdoms can be seen and recorded in history books, but not so the kingdom of God. It is invisible, hidden in the hearts of men, women, and children ruled by the King.

What kind of a king and what kind of a kingdom were the people looking for? That became evident after Jesus had fed five thousand and more with but five barley loaves and two small fish. What a king this Jesus would make! With but a word of thanksgiving He could fill the stomachs of the multitudes! They were about to come and force Him to become their king. When Jesus perceived this, He departed alone to a mountain to pray. The next day He proclaimed Himself to be the Bread of Life and many turned away.

When Peter sought to defend Jesus by drawing his sword, Jesus rebuked him, ***“Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish with the sword” (Matthew 26:52).*** Earthly kingdoms are established and maintained by the power of the sword. The kingdom of God is established and maintained by the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.

When Jesus was interrogated by Pilate concerning His kingdom, Jesus testified, ***“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).*** Pilate understood; the Jews did not and still do not comprehend the nature of the kingdom.

The Apostle Paul in one brief statement teaches what the kingdom is not and what it is: ***“The kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).*** The Jews had no need for righteousness, for they were confident that their own righteousness was adequate. Hence the Lord’s kingdom had nothing to offer them.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul described the citizen of the kingdom of God as ***“having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:10-18).*** That is hardly a description of a citizen of an earthly kingdom, but indeed one of our Lord’s kingdom.

The kingdom that most Jews awaited and still await is not the kingdom that Jesus established. The kingdom comes and remains, as Luther put it, ***“when our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word, and lead a godly life here in time, and hereafter in eternity.”***