

The Kingdom of God

Introduction

What the kingdom of God is, where it is located, and what its future is greatly misunderstood by most in Christendom. The majority of Christians have been taught that the kingdom of God is in heaven, or in one's heart, or the Church is the kingdom, or it is social justice, or it is a conversion experience. The goal of this study is to reveal the nature of the kingdom of God.

Kingdom in Crisis

The Bible reveals that God, at the strategic level, rules over all the kingdoms of the earth (2 Kings 19.15; 2 Chronicles 20.6, 36.23; Ezra 1.2; Isaiah 37.16; Daniel 4.17, 5.21). This is part of His sovereignty. The Bible also reveals that at the operational level, Satan controls the kingdoms of this world. He is the puppet-master of the world's governments.

According to Genesis, God delegated kingship of the earth to Adam (Genesis 1.27-30). When Adam sinned, he lost that dominion. As a result, Satan resumed his control over the earth which he apparently enjoyed before God created man (Ezekiel 28.13). Paul wrote that Satan is the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4.3-4). As such, he has the authority to give the kingdoms of the world to whomever he desires. Satan asserted that authority in his temptation of the Lord in the desert (Matthew 4.8-9; Luke 4.5-6). The Lord did not refute Satan's claim. He knew it was legitimate.

Satan's authority over the earth will end in massive war and judgment such as the world has never experienced. Satan's power over mankind will reach its apex in the Tribulation. During those seven years, Satan will establish and elevate his man, the Antichrist (1 John 2.19, 22, 4.3; 1 John 1.7, a.k.a. the son of perdition or son of destruction, the man of sin or

the man of lawlessness, 2 Thessalonians 2.3, the Beast, Revelation 11.7, 13.1-5, the lawless one, 2 Thessalonians 2.8) to world-ruler (Revelation 13.16-17). The Antichrist's main effort during the Tribulation period will be to orchestrate and enforce worship of Satan. During the Tribulation, Satan will step from behind the curtain. Most of humanity will worship him directly or vicariously through the person of the Antichrist and his image (Revelation 13.4-5, 8, 12, 15). The penalty of refusing to worship Satan will be death. These will be humanity's darkest days.

God promised rulership of the world to His Son. While the first Adam failed through disobedience, losing the world, the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, will through obedience, regain Adam's lost estate (Revelation 5.9-14) and rule as King over the earth (Zechariah 14.9). David, in his prophetic role, wrote Psalm 2, and outlined God's prophetic plan of the Son's rulership:

¹ *Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing?*

² *The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,*

³ *"Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!"*

⁴ *He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them.*

⁵ *Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying,*

⁶ *"But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain."*

⁷ *"I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.*

⁸ *'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your*

possession.

⁹ 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'"

¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth.

¹¹ Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling.

¹² Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

Concept of the Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is a foundational theological doctrine in the Bible with two senses: general and particular. The general sense may be defined as God's rule over all creation, especially over creatures who are loyal or have responded to Him. The particular sense of the kingdom of God is God's rule over His covenant people, Israel. This rule will began after Israel responds to Him and He establishes His earthly kingdom (Zechariah 12.10; Matthew 23.39; Romans 11.26). The context of a passage will determine the sense.

Matthew's phrase "kingdom of heaven" is unique to him and is a technical phrase. It is used only in reference to God's rule over national Israel in which the Messiah will rule as Israel's King. It never is used to mean God's universal rule over His creation.

Senses of God's Kingship	God's Kingship Defined
Kingship Over All Creation	The Kingdom of God is a description of God's rule over all creation, specifically over those who have given Him their trust and allegiance (cf. Psalm 45.6, 47.7; Revelation 19.16).

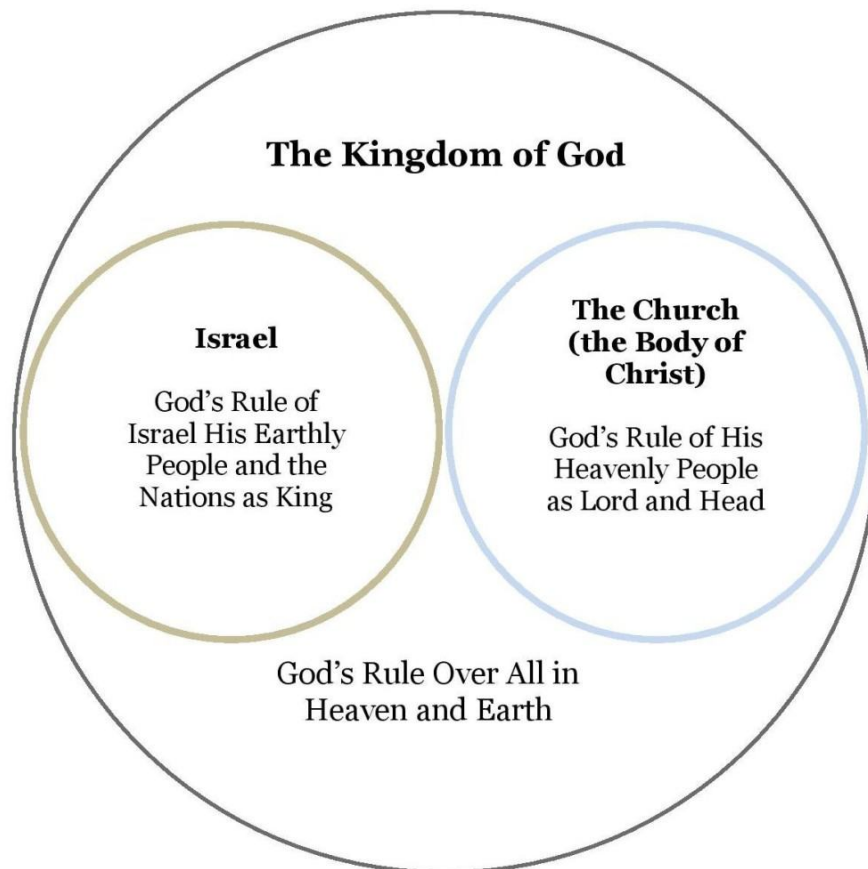
Kingship Over Israel	The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven describe God's rule over Israel. God's covenants define this rule, i.e., Abrahamic, Mosaic, Sabbatic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New covenants. ¹ As David's "greater Son," the Lord Jesus Christ will rule as King over national Israel and the earth (Deuteronomy 28.12-13; Isaiah 9.6-7; Zechariah 14.9; Luke 1.31-33).
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The Church (the Body of Christ)

The Bible declares the Church is the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1.22-23; Colossians 1.18, 24). The Church is not a kingdom. The Bible never states the Lord Jesus Christ is the King of the Church. His title over the Church is Lord or Head, not King. A king has subjects. Members of the Body of Christ are children of God, heirs and joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8.16-17), not subjects. A joint-heir is one with equal legal access to everything belonging to the primary owner.

The below chart and diagram illustrate the components of God's rule:

The Kingdom of God: God's Rule Over All in Heaven and in Earth	
Israel	The Church (the Body of Christ)
God's Rule of Israel His Earthly People and the Nations as King	God's Rule of His Heavenly People as Lord and Head



Clarifications: What the Kingdom is Not

As we consider what the Kingdom of God is, we should also consider what it is not. Thus:

1. The Kingdom is not the Church. As noted, the Church (the Body of Christ) is not a kingdom. It is the Body of Christ. The believer's role as part of the Body of Christ is to look to Him as Lord and Head, not as King. Believers in Paul's gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4) have heavenly citizenship (Ephesians 1.3, 2.6; Philippians 3.20) and are children and joint-heirs of Christ (Romans 8.16-17). While the Church is not a kingdom *per se*, it resides within the overall realm of the Kingdom of God as its heavenly component.
2. The Kingdom is not a personal conversion experience. The Kingdom of God is a realm and a location, not an experience.
3. The Kingdom is not the gospel. The gospel is the means

by which we have a relationship with God and the means by which we enter the Kingdom of God. The clearest definition of the gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15.1-4. To have one's sins forgiven and receive eternal life one must place his trust in the fact of Christ's work on his behalf: that Christ died for him and rose from the grave. Salvation is wholly apart from works (Romans 4.1-5). Salvation is faith + 0.

4. The Kingdom is not social justice. Social justice will reach its zenith in the Messianic Kingdom when Jesus the Messiah-King reigns from Jerusalem over the world (Zechariah 14.9) and will continue in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21). At the present time, Satan reigns as "the god of this world" and rules the world's governments (2 Corinthians 4.4). His rule will continue until he is defeated at the end of the Tribulation and finally, at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 19.11-21, 20.2-3, 7-10). Little social justice is possible under Satan's dominion. The Lord Jesus Christ is presently seated at the right hand of the Father's throne awaiting His throne and kingdom (Psalm 110.1). After His return at the battle of Armageddon He will occupy the throne of David in Jerusalem and establish His earthly kingdom. This kingdom will be the prelude to His kingdom in eternity after God creates a new heaven and new earth.

A Problem Passage: Luke 17.20-21

The most misunderstood passage about the kingdom of God is Luke 17.20-21. Theologians and preachers have so abused this passage that restoring it to its Biblical sense is nearly an impossible task.

Throughout the pulpits and classrooms preachers and professors teach that the kingdom of God is not a visible kingdom but a spiritual one that resides in the hearts of men. Such an interpretation is remarkable since it is contrary to every

other declaration on the kingdom in the Scriptures and directly contradicts what Jesus taught elsewhere about the kingdom of God. In other words, if this interpretation is correct, it contradicts the entire testimony of Scripture.

Examining the Text (Luke 17.20-21)

²⁰ 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; ²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

An examination of Jesus' response requires that we keep one fact firmly in mind: He responded to people according to their attitude towards Him. Most of the professional theologians of Jesus' day approached Him with with a single purpose: to find a way to discredit or condemn Him. Jesus' response to those individuals was guarded, cryptic, and sometimes angry. Most of the theologians who approached Him had no interest in truth. As a result, Jesus did not trust them (John 2.23-25). It is interesting to note that religious professionals were the only group who moved Him to anger.

John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Twelve preached repentance because the kingdom of God was near (Matthew 3.1, 4.17, 10.7). Such a message was unpopular to the ruling religious establishment for they enjoyed their position and rule. The Pharisees asked Him, "when the kingdom of God was coming" (πότε ἔρχεται ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ). The word "questioned" used by Luke is the verb [ἐπερωτάω](#) which means "interrogate," "demand an answer." Such language indicated this encounter, as usual, was unfriendly. The Pharisees came with an agenda and their questions were designed to entrap and condemn Him. As such, Jesus responded to them according to their attitude.

The Pharisees knew Jesus (and John the Baptist before Him)

preached that the kingdom of God was near (Matthew 3.1-2, 4.17). They most likely knew Jesus had declared John the Baptist could have fulfilled the prophetic role of Elijah if the nation would have believed him (Matthew 17.1-9, 11.7-19). So what kind of answer did Jesus give the Pharisees? In Luke 17.20-21 we read Jesus' response:

²⁰ *The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed;*

²¹ *nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."*

The text reads as follows:

²⁰ Οὐκ ἔρχεται ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ παρατηρήσεως,
The kingdom of God is not coming with attentive watching,

²¹ οὐδὲ ἐροῦσιν, Ἴδοὺ ὧδε: ἢ, Ἐκεῖ: ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν.
Neither will they say, "Behold, here!, or there! For behold the kingdom of God is in your midst.

The phrase "with observation" is μετὰ παρατηρήσεως. The noun [παρατήρησις](#) is used only here in the New Testament and means to see something with the eyes. If we just had this verse and no other the idea that the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom would have merit. But that is not the case. Hundreds of verses in the Scriptures attest that the kingdom of God as it relates to Israel will be a visible, earthly kingdom (Matthew 6.10). We must conclude, therefore, that Jesus' reply meant something other than that the kingdom of God was spiritual (non-physical).

The Meaning of the Text

Jesus had preached the nearness of the kingdom of God for almost three years. This kingdom had been revealed by the prophets. In it, Israel will be preeminent among the nations (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13; cf. Romans 15.8). The Messiah will

reign from Jerusalem as David's greater Son (Luke 1.32) and will be characterized by universal peace and righteousness (Isaiah 2.4, 11.1-9). The Old Testament contains hundreds of verses about the nature of this kingdom on earth.

By this time, Jesus had performed thousands of miracles or signs of which the gospels record but a small portion (John 21.25). When John the Baptist doubted (because he was imprisoned) that Jesus was the promised Messiah and wondered about the nearness of the coming of the kingdom, Jesus reassured John of the authenticating signs he had seen. These signs verified He was the Messiah (Luke 7.19-22). What did Jesus mean by His reply to the Pharisees that the kingdom *did not come* with signs or observation? Before answering this, let us finish the remainder of the verse.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees that "the kingdom of God is within you" did *not* mean the kingdom was in their hearts.² They hated Him and wanted to kill Him. The *last* place the kingdom existed was in *their* hearts. Jesus' reply to them was *sarcastic* and *cryptic*. He knew their hearts. He knew they did not want the truth. He responded to them according to their attitude. The meaning of Jesus' statement, "with observation," (παρατήρησις is a *hapax legomenon*) is helped by the cognate verb [παρατηρέω](#) which means "watch closely," "watch assiduously" (Mark 3.2; Luke 6.7, 14.1; Acts 9.24; Galatians 4.10). Thus, Jesus' sarcastic and cryptic reply had the following sense:

"You don't get it. And you'll never get it since you don't want to get it. You've come trying to entrap Me. You won't believe Who I am even though I have performed thousands of miracles which validate I am the Messiah. You do not want the truth. Therefore, I tell you—to see the kingdom doesn't require signs that require παρατηρήσεως, i.e., eye strain (attentive watching). The "sign" of the kingdom is here. The King stands before you!"

A Verification Passage

Lest anyone doubt this interpretation, let us examine an earlier passage to confirm it. Luke wrote:

¹⁴ And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute; when the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed. ¹⁵ But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." ¹⁶ Others, to test Him, were demanding of Him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ But He knew their thoughts and said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and a house divided against itself falls. ¹⁸ If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? So they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Luke 11.14-20).

Jesus declared the *sign* of casting out of demons revealed the kingdom of God had "come upon" [φθάνω](#) them. Was His casting out demons visible? It was. If the coming of the kingdom was not "with observation," how could Jesus declare it had come with observation? The answer is, He couldn't and didn't. Therefore, His words in Luke 17 meant something different than what most are taught.

Jesus Teaches His Disciples (Luke 17.22-37)

This section of the chapter brings everything together. In His instruction to his disciples, Jesus told them, "the days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it." Luke recorded:

²² And He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you

will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³ *“They will say to you, ‘Look there! Look here!’ Do not go away, and do not run after them.*

In verse 22, we find a remarkable contrast to what Jesus told the Pharisees and what He told His disciples. To the Pharisees, He declared the kingdom was right in front of them and that He had validated His claim as the Messiah through miracles. But Jesus told His disciples the time was coming when they would wish the King was with them but He would not be. He warned them with words similar (but so different!) to those He had expressed to the Pharisees. Below is a comparison of the text of v.21 and 23.

²¹ οὐδὲ ἐροῦσιν, Ἴδου ὧδε: ἢ, Ἐκεῖ: ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν.

Neither will they say, “Behold, here!, or there! For behold the kingdom of God is in your midst.

²³ καὶ ἐροῦσιν ὑμῖν, Ἴδου ἐκεῖ: [ἢ,] Ἴδου ὧδε: μὴ ἀπέλθητε μηδὲ διώξητε.

“And they will say to you, ‘Behold there! Behold here!’ Do not follow [them] neither not run after [them].

Jesus, the rightful King, stood before those who wished to kill Him. He told them the kingdom of God was in their midst in the person of the King. In verse 23, Jesus warned His disciples a day was coming in which He would *not* be present when men declared that He was present. Instead, what *would* be present would be a pretender, an impostor, a false messiah. Jesus warned his disciples *not* to follow those who claimed that the Messiah had come. He went on to predict how He would be rejected by His generation and the dark days that would come which would give rise to the false messiah (cf. John 1.11, 5.39-47). Luke continued,

²⁴ *“For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one*

part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day. ²⁵ “But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. ²⁶ “And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷ they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸ “It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; ²⁹ but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰ “It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ “On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back. ³² “Remember Lot’s wife. ³³ “Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴ “I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁵ “There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁶ [“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.”] ³⁷ And answering they said to Him, “Where, Lord?” And He said to them, “Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered.”

Jesus revealed what would occur after He would suffer and be rejected by His generation. The days of Noah and of Lot would return. Destruction came unexpectedly in that earlier time. Jesus told his disciples, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Why would He mention this? Angels had warned Lot’s family God would destroy

Sodom. They were told not to look back on the city as they made their escape (Genesis 9.17, 26). Lot's wife disobeyed and became a pillar of salt. The cause of disobedience is unbelief. Lot's wife refused to believe and lost her life. Jesus cautioned his followers to obedience.

The Kingdom Revealed

The Kingdom of God Revealed Throughout the Scriptures		
Kingdom of God	Progressive Revelation	Condition
Old Testament Prophetic Revelation	Promised (Deuteronomy 28.12-13; Isaiah 9.6-7, 11.1-10; Zechariah 14.9; Luke 1.31-33)	Advent of the Messiah
The Lord's Earthly Ministry	Proclaimed (Matthew 3.2, 4.17, 23)	Repentance
Post Resurrection: Early Acts	Offered (Acts 3.13-21)	Repentance
Post Resurrection: Early and Later Acts	Rejected and Postponed (Acts 7, 13.45-46, 18.5-6, 28.23-29)	Repentance
Return of Christ: Prophecy Fulfilled	Established (Matthew 23.37-39; Zechariah 12.10, 13.6, 14.9; Romans 11.25-29; Revelation 12.5)	Repentance

The Components and Character of the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God	
Components (Israel)	Characteristics (Israel and the Church)
King	Eternal
Land	Holy
Government	Righteousness

References to the Kingdom of God Related to Israel in the Old Testament

Hundreds of passages proclaim and describe the kingdom that God promised Israel in the Old Testament. God promised Israel they would have a King and a vast land area (Genesis 15.18-21). The kingdom of God on earth will be characterized by righteousness, peace, and holiness (Exodus 19.6; Deuteronomy 28.9). In this new world order, Israel will become preeminent among the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13). The promises God gave the nation were conditional for they required Israel's obedience. Their disobedience culminated with the nation's rejection and murder of their Messiah. Despite Israel's historic failure, God promised His kingdom would become a reality. How will this be? A future generation, the Tribulation generation, will repent and turn to God (Zechariah 12.10; Matthew 23.39; Romans 11.26). When they do, He will return and as promised, write His laws in their hearts (the New Covenant). Under the governance of the New Covenant they will obey Him (Jeremiah 31.1, 31-37; Ezekiel 11.19, 36.26) and fulfill their destiny as a nation of priests (Exodus 19.5-6).

Paul and the Kingdom of God

God commissioned Paul as the "Apostle of the Gentiles" (Romans 11.13). In this role, his focus was upon preaching the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24; 1 Corinthians 15.1-4) and establishment of the Church, the body of Christ, in which Jew and Gentile are equal in Christ (Ephesians 2.11-22, 3.1-9; Galatians 3.27-29). The Church, the body of Christ, was a secret ([μυστήριον](#)), unknown until God revealed it through Paul (Ephesians 3.1-9; Colossians 1.24-17). Therefore, it was not Paul's purpose to focus on the kingdom of God as it pertained to Israel. When Paul used the phrase "kingdom of God" (Acts 14.22, 19.8, 20.25, 28.23, 31 Romans 14.17; 1 Corinthians

4.20, 6.9, 10, 15.50; Galatians 5.21; Colossians 1.13, 4.11; 2 Thessalonians 1.5) he usually meant the overall realm of God, not the particular, earthly kingdom described by the prophets and taught by John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Twelve. The exceptions were Acts 19.8, 28.23 when he spoke to Jews.

Conclusion

The Kingdom of God encompasses both earthly and heavenly realms. Throughout the Scriptures, God has kept these realms separate. In the original creation He created heaven and earth (Genesis 1.1). In the future creation He will create a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21.1) Israel is God's earthly people; the Church, the Body of Christ, is God's heavenly people. Jesus ministered to Jew only (with a couple exceptions) throughout the gospels (Romans 15.8). His focus during this time was upon the prophesied earthly kingdom in which He would reign as David's greater Son (Isaiah 11.1; Matthew 9.27, 15.22, 20.30, 21.15, 22.41-46; Luke 1.31-33). The signs and miracles He performed confirmed He was the Messiah-King. When He returns at the end of the Tribulation He will establish His kingdom upon the earth and fulfill all of His promises to the nation of Israel. They will achieve their destiny as a priestly nation (Exodus 19.5-6).

The Church, the Body of Christ, is God's heavenly people. All the Scriptural language pertaining to the Church is heavenly. The Church has no land-grant. God sees members of the Body of Christ as seated in heaven with heavenly citizenship (Ephesians 1.3, 2.6; Philippians 3.20). God will remove His Church from the earth before His judgments began upon the earth (1 Thessalonians 1.10, 4.13-18, 5.9).

Finally, one day, every living creature in the universe will bow and acknowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is Lord over all (Philippians 2.10-11; Isaiah 45.23; Romans 14.11). That is the day of final victory, the day in which Christ will be recognized as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the day to

which all Scripture is working.

¹ See the author's study on [Israel's covenants](#).

² *Vincent's Word Studies*, s.v. Luke 17.21, "Better, in the midst of." Meyer acutely remarks that "you refers to the Pharisees, in whose hearts nothing certainly found a place less than did the ethical kingdom of God." Jesus was not speaking of the inwardness of the kingdom but of its presence. "The whole language of the kingdom of heaven being within men, rather than men being within the kingdom, is modern" (Trench, after Meyer)." See also, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, s.v. "[within](#)," Note: This is a translation of (a) entos: see INSIDE, No. 1; in Luke 17:21 the RV marg., "in the midst of," is to be preferred; the kingdom of God was not in the hearts of the Pharisees; (b) en, "of thinking or saying within oneself," e.g., Luke 7:39, 49 (marg., "among").

³ Early manuscripts do not include this verse.

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