bible studies

for kinship groups

by
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bible studies for small group leaders on Vineyard distinctives

Kingdom of God, Worship, Healing, Relationships and Ministry to the Poor

Kinship Bible Studies
Index

Introduction	1
Kingdom of God	
Central in the Ministry of Jesus	7
The Already and the Not Yet	13
The Secrets of the Kingdom	20
The Clash of Two Kingdoms	27
The Demand of the Kingdom	33
Worship	
Our Highest Priority	39
What Happens When We Worship	48
Worshippers the Father Seeks	59
What True Worship is Like	70
Healing	
Part of the Kingdom of God	81
Healing is the Will of God	89
Worldviews can affect Healing	95
The Role of Authority	105
The Necessity of Faith	114
Healing the Whole Person	123
Relationships	
Unity	134
Diversity in Unity	143
The Necessity of Love	152
Handling Conflicts	162
Ministry to the Poor	
The Role in Jesus' Mission	174
God's Heart in the Law of Moses	182
Lessons from the Prophets	189
What Jesus Taught	205
The Example of the Church	213

Introduction

BIBLE STUDIES
For Small Groups

Dear Small Group Leader,

Leading a small group can be both rewarding and exhausting. It can be rewarding because you are involved in the care and spiritual growth of other people. There is tremendous satisfaction in knowing that God is using you! But leading a small group can at the same time be exhausting. It's usually up to the leader to make sure that everything is planned for the meeting, that a teaching is prepared and that members are ministered to and have their needs met. So often, however, small group leaders find that at the end of a busy day at work and responsibilities at home, they have no energy or creativity left to put into their small group. It's no wonder Christian leaders experience what has commonly been referred to as "burn-out"!

These Bible studies have been created for small group leaders in Vineyard for two reasons. One is to assist leaders with task of preparing for their group, hopefully avoiding potential "burn-outs". Each study is complete as is and does not require extensive preparation time. The other reason is to ensure that the members of Vineyard are biblically literate and well instructed in key theological and doctrinal truths. While small group leaders have the freedom to study just about anything they'd like in their groups, it is important for group members to understand what Vineyard believes as a church and why biblically Vineyard is committed to these truths.

The desire of the pastors and staff at Vineyard is to encourage and help leaders however possible. These studies are just one way we are trying to make your responsibilities as a small group leader more manageable and more enjoyable.

Marlene Nathan

Why use Bible Study discussions?

The goal of small groups in Vineyard is to encourage spiritual growth and provide care for people. One aspect of spiritual growth is the study of God's Word. It's been proven that the more involved a person is in the learning process, the more they will learn and retain. Bible study discussion involves group members in a way bible teaching or lecturing does not. People will learn more by actively participating in the discussions and making their own discoveries in the scripture. And doing this in the group can show members how they can begin to study the bible in depth on their own at home. Bible study discussions also help form bonds of friendship between group members. When people are given the opportunity to share their personal thoughts and feelings, relationships just naturally develop. This in turn can provide people with a network of supportive relationships in a day when many are isolated and alone.

How to use these bible studies in your group.

These studies were written to be used by you in preparation for your small group and were not designed to be copied and handed out to your group. The *process* of learning the scripture is as valuable as arriving at all the correct answers. Providing your group with the questions and the answers will defeat this purpose. The idea is to get people to think and dig into the bible themselves. You also want to encourage group interaction and handing out a bible study to read may distract people from participating in group discussion.

The only things you will need to prepare for the group discussions are your bible and the bible study. Each study is divided into several different sections. They begin with a couple quotes that are designed to introduce the topic. Next is a clear statement of the purpose of the study, followed by a key bible verse. The next few paragraphs, under the heading "openers", might give you some ideas of how to begin discussing the topic with your group. Motivation for study is important and you want to show your group why the topic being studied is relevant for them. This is followed by one or two opening questions that are designed to help you discover the extent of your group's understanding about the topic.

At this point, the passage is cited and the actual study begins. Depending on the topic and passage, there may some comments that are there to help you understand the context or background of the passage being used. Sometimes you may want to share these comments with the group, depending how helpful they may be to your discussion. The questions are designed to make people first observe closely what the scripture says, then move to what the scripture means and finally apply the scripture personally to their lives. Most questions are followed by some comments which are there to provide additional background information, interpret difficult verses and clarify the meaning of particular words or phrases. In essence, they are there so that you will have an adequate grasp of the passage and will be ready to lead discussion and answer questions. Finally at the end there is a small section called "wrapping it up" which summarizes in a simple and concise way what significant truths were addressed during the study.

Here are a few additional hints:

1. **Be Flexible!** Each study contains a lot of material but not all of it must be used. A lot depends on the make-up of your group, how much of the bible they already know and how talkative they are. Sometimes, you will have to present an interesting introduction and ask a lot of questions to get a good discussion going. Other times one question is all that is needed to get people talking about the passage and hitting the issues that need to be discussed. These studies can become very long if your particular group likes to talk. You may want to take two meetings for each study. (Some even cover two separate passages, so dividing the material in half should be no problem.) Remember that bible study is only one part of kinship. Be sure to keep discussion time to 30 or 40 minutes so that there will be enough time left in your group for worship and ministry.

2. **Be Creative.** Keep in mind that these bible studies were written to help you and not restrict you to a particular style of group discussion. Perhaps you will only use part of the study, but by reading it, you get ideas for other passages and other questions that can be used. However these studies can help you as a leader is how you ought to use them.

3. **Be Sure to Hit the Mark!** Although you are free to be flexible and are encouraged to be creative, make sure the stated purpose of each study is accomplished! Again, while we want to help you as a leader, we also want the members of Vineyard to become biblically literate in important doctrinal truths.

4. **Be Prepared.** The comments and information in each study have been obtained from theological books and commentaries. This was done to save you as the leader the time involved to do the research yourself. So it is important that in preparing for your group that you read through the study ahead of time and look up all the cross references mentioned. This way you will know what you are talking about! It is often during group discussions that questions will be asked of you about the passage. Hopefully the information in the study will help you be prepared to answer people's honest questions. Also, you cannot just assume that all the people in your group have a good working knowledge of the bible. What may seem basic and elementary to you may be what the people in your group still need to learn. For others, the information in each study will be very familiar to your group and much too basic. Perhaps you will want to do more study because that is what your group needs. That's great! (see #1 and #2)

How to lead a group discussion.

Leading a group discussion is truly more of an art than a technique. It is best learned by practice and experience than from a book. So much depends on the personality of the leader and the make-up of the group that specific methods are usually unhelpful. There are a few guidelines though that can help a group discussion work better:

1. **Be the leader!** Many people don't like group discussions because no one seems to be in charge and the discussions wander aimlessly and pointlessly till the meeting is over. When that happens, it is because the leader is not leading! It is up to you as the leader to direct and guide discussions. You need to keep an eye on where the discussion is going and when it gets too far off course, you need to interject comments and direct people back to the topic. People won't be interested if they feel it is a waste of time, so as the leader make sure the discussions are on track and heading somewhere. At first, you may have to take a more dominant role, and get people "stirred up" until they get use to participating. But as people get more comfortable with the format, they should enter into the discussion quite easily and begin responding to each other and not just to you.

2. **Be a good listener.** People will want to share when they feel they'll be heard. Make sure you use common courtesy and listen to what is being said! Give eye contact and lots of affirmation for sharing. Respond to what was said so people know you really are listening (and are not just thinking about what you are going to say next). When appropriate, refer back to what someone said earlier so people know what they say is important enough to remember. All of these things will encourage good discussion.

3. **Be sensitive.** For many people, talking in a group is a big risk! They will watch how you as the leader respond to them and to others when they contribute to the discussion. They want to know it is "safe". They don't want to be judged or ignored or be told they are wrong in front of others. Be gentle and affirming. Make it clear to your group that it is safe to share thoughts and ideas, that no one will reprimanded for a "wrong" answer, and that everyone is learning together.

4. **Be on time.** People will quickly tire of group discussions if they take over the entire group, leaving no time for anything else. And this is so easy to happen! So watch the clock and be sure to limit discussion, no matter how good it is getting. Better to have them go away hungry because then they'll come back for more!

5. **Be aware of potential problems.** Many people dislike group discussions because of all the problems that are possible. It is helpful to be aware of the pitfalls ahead of time and have some idea how to handle them when they pop up.

    a. *The problem of rabbit trails.* There is a delicate balance between keeping the discussion on track and allowing people the freedom to share. It's up to you to determine where that balance is and to gently but firmly bring the discussion back to the topic at hand. Some rabbit trails are worth exploring and people will appreciate the consideration you give them by addressing some of these trails from time to time. But an entire meeting of them can feel like a waste of time. So be alert!

b. *The problem of the filibuster.* Invariably, each group has one: someone who just plain talks too much! (By the way, make sure that it isn't you!) It will help if once you know who they are, to sit next to them in the room rather than across from them. This will cut down on eye contact and may discourage a lot of talking. Also, without being rude, you need pass the discussion on to another group member with some deliberation. "Why don't we hear from someone else now. What do you think about what we've been discussing, Sue?" Remember, that when one person is too dominating in the group, other members will loose interest.

c. *The problem of the shrinking violet.* There are usually more than one of these in a group, but these are the folks who are very shy and very afraid of speaking in front of others. They need lots of encouragement and much affirmation. If you have a lot of these in your group, cut down on any joking around, as shrinking violets may fear being teased in front of others. (Some joking, however, can have the affect of lightening any tension in the room, so here again, discernment is key.) Whatever you do, you want your group to feel extremely safe. Talk with these folks before the meeting. Ask them to read passages out loud. Without being intimidating or putting them on the spot, ask them a question directly. Make it your goal to get your shrinking violets fully participating in group discussions.

d. *The problem of the difference of opinion.* Not everyone is going to agree about everything all the time in your group. Disagreements are inevitable but in a group, little disagreements can become full-blown arguments without the people involved intending for that to happen. And arguments "in public" are embarrassing and sometimes hard to recover from. On this issue, men and women relate very differently. Men will not usually avoid a disagreement and often they enjoy a good, lively debate. In fact, some men may wish to debate just for the sheer enjoyment of it. Women on the other hand, value harmony and for the sake of harmony will avoid a disagreement at all costs. What is often sacrificed in the process of all this is the truth. Here is where it is important for you to be both well prepared and extremely tactful. Try to understand what the issues in the passage are ahead of time and anticipate potential disagreements. Gently but firmly maintain what you believe to be truth while at the same time make allowances for gray areas where there is legitimate room for disagreement. And when you're not really sure, admit it and agree to find out some answers for the next meeting.

e. *The problem of too personal/impersonal sharing.* Here again is an area where people differ on what they prefer. Some people will feel that group discussion is not successful unless the sharing gets to an intensely intimate level and people are sharing personal secrets and everyone is crying. Others will feel very uncomfortable with sharing at this level and instead prefer the discussion to remain at a very theoretical and impersonal level. In general, women prefer personal sharing and men prefer impersonal. Both extremes will be unhelpful for your group. There are things that really are too personal for group discussion and bringing them

up is just plain inappropriate. When this happens, show compassion, but indicate that you would like to talk with the person some more about it after the meeting alone. (Of course, if your group has been together a long time and know each other intimately already, then this doesn't apply!) The other extreme is not good either, because small groups are where we care for each other. There's got to be some measure of personal disclosure for care to happen and relationships to grow. There are personal type questions in each study in order to give people the permission to share personally in the group. Be patient with those who are resistant to personal disclosure but set an example yourself. Often the tone for sharing in a group is set out by the leader. If the leader can be personal, then the rest of the group can be personal as well.

6. **Have Fun!** Group discussions can be a lot more fun for the leader because all the pressure is off to "perform" and make it happen. You can actually enjoy yourself. And, you might learn something in the process. God's word is so rich that you will no doubt learn something new each week from what someone else shares. So have a good time!

1

THE KINGDOM OF GOD
Central In The Ministry Of Jesus

"For the first twelve years of my Christian life I gave little thought to the kingdom of God. My pastors and Bible teachers had taught that the kingdom would come at the second coming of Christ and, therefore, had little significance in our lives today....I find my neglect of the kingdom remarkable because it is so clearly at the center of Jesus' teaching...I [now realize] that at the very heart of the gospel lies the kingdom of God and that power for effective evangelism and discipleship relates directly to our understanding and experiencing the kingdom today."

Kingdom Come
John Wimber

"The gospel according to Mark begins the story of Jesus' ministry with these significant words: 'Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel"' (1:14-15). Mark thus makes it plain that the burden of Jesus' preaching was to announce the Kingdom of God; that was the central thing with which he was concerned. A reading of the teachings of Jesus as they are found in the Gospels only serves to bear this statement out. Everywhere the Kingdom of God is on his lips, and it is always a matter of desperate importance."

The Kingdom of God
John Bright

AIM OF STUDY:

To establish the centrality of the Kingdom of God in the ministry and teaching of Jesus and to begin to explore the relevance of this to us as Christians.

KEY VERSE:

But He said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." (Luke 4:43)

OPENERS:

Perhaps you can identify with the statement John Wimber made in his booklet entitled *Kingdom Come*. Perhaps you have also given little, if any thought to the kingdom of God. Perhaps you have also been taught that the kingdom is something that won't be experienced until heaven or some point far off in the future and so, it is not something to be concerned about right now. Certainly anyone who reads the daily paper and watches the evening news doesn't see much evidence of the kingdom of God.

Yet the Kingdom of God literally dominates the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. It is obvious that He did not see the kingdom as something restricted only to the future with little relevance to everyday life. In the four gospels alone, the phrase "Kingdom of God" or "Kingdom of Heaven" appears 84 times. To contrast, the word "cross" (undeniably central to the ministry of Jesus and the life of the Christian) appears only 17 times. And the words "gospel" and "good news" (which is the message Jesus and His disciples preached) appear only 23 times.

The kingdom is central to the teachings of the apostles in the early church as well. When the apostle Paul traveled to Ephesus, Luke writes in Acts 19:8 that he "..entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for *three months*, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God." While under arrest in Rome, meetings were arranged, and "From morning till evening he [Paul] explained and declared to them the kingdom of God..". And the final verse in the book of Acts reads, "Boldly and without hindrance he [Paul] preached the kingdom of God [for two years] and taught about the Lord Jesus.

If the Kingdom of God plays such a prominent role in the New Testament, then it is vitally important for us to both recognize this and to understand the implications this has for our lives.

1. **Before we begin our study, when you hear the words "Kingdom of God" or "Kingdom of Heaven", what comes to your mind?**

2. **What, if anything, of what I've just shared about is totally new to you, something you have never heard before?**

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Luke 4:38-44

Jesus is at the very beginning of His earthly ministry here and His popularity is growing and Luke writes that "everyone praised Him." (Everyone, that is except those He knew from His hometown of Nazareth, where He incites an angry mob after reading from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue [4:14-30].) But He quickly regains popularity after traveling to Capernaum and casting a demon out of a man in the synagogue there.

3. **This begins as a very typical Sabbath for Jesus and the disciples. They attend synagogue and then together go to Peter's home for a meal. But what happens there? What are any observations you can make about this healing of Peter's mother-in-law? What makes it different from some of Jesus' other healings recorded elsewhere in the New Testament that you may be familiar with?**

   Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law by rebuking the fever. There is no mention here that he lays hands on her, although He may have, since in Matthew and Mark's accounts it says He touches her hand. But no account says He petitions God the Father for her to be healed. He spoke right to the condition and seemed to expect it to obey His command! Jesus exhibits the same kind of confidence in His authority to heal with just a word as a policeman does in his authority to stop traffic with just a raised hand.

4. **The setting of the sun marks the end of the Sabbath and the people are once again free to travel and work. What do they choose to do? Why?**

   If anyone has ever been to a third world nation, then you have a little feel for what it may have been like to live in Jesus' day. Doctors and medical treatment were not readily available and sickness and disease was commonplace. So, when word gets out that there is a man in town who can heal, everyone shows up and brings a friend, and all of them have needs!

5. **Luke writes that Jesus laid His hands on each one, and healed them. He also cast out demons, but would not allow the demons to identify Him. This has for centuries puzzled theologians and students of the Bible, because it would seem helpful to Jesus' mission if everyone knew who He really was. What are some reasons why you think He would silence the demons?**

   Jesus had a strong sense of timing and several times He said, "It is not my time" meaning, it's not yet time for Him to go to the cross. According to the New Testament, there were appointed times for things to take place and this was all planned

out by God. (see Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:15; Luke 19:44; John 2:4; 7:6-8; Acts 17:26; 2 Thes. 2:6; Heb. 9:9-10; Rev. 1:3) So He possibly silenced the demons because a premature, public disclosure of who He really was would interfere with this timing. He may have silenced them because Jesus did not wish to have any P.R. from the enemy camp. He may have also silenced them because He wanted people to seek after Him with some measure of hunger and earnestness, and not just be told who He was without the personal effort.

6. **Once again, Jesus does the unexpected. As more people come to Him in the morning with needs, He decides to leave that town and go to another. What is the reason He gives? How did He arrive at this decision? What can you learn from Jesus' actions here that can help you make decisions about God's will for your life?**

Jesus does not mean here that the *one and only* reason He came was to preach the kingdom, because that would be inconsistent with other statements He makes concerning His mission. We could understand His statement as one of the many reasons He came, and even perhaps a primary reason was to preach the good news of the kingdom. So Jesus had a mission, a purpose for being sent to earth, and He did not just respond to circumstances or the needs and demands of others. While the scripture doesn't specify, we can assume people were looking for Him because there was more for Him to do: more healing and more casting out demons. But Jesus was comfortable to leave these needs unmet so that He could fulfill His mission. It appears that He made His decision based on His time alone with the Father just that morning. Obeying God was Jesus' motivation in everything He did and more important to Him than pleasing people. (see John 14:31) When we are trying to determine God's will for ourselves, it is important that we don't get our cues <u>just</u> from circumstances or other people. As with this case in Luke 4, God's will does not always appear like the best decision. Many might have said it would have been better for Jesus to stay a few more days in Capernaum, heal some more sick people, cast out some more demons and then move on. What difference would a few days make? After all, the people had needs, they were open to Him, and it would have been a tremendous faith builder for the disciples to see Jesus perform miracles . The only way to be sure about God's will is to spend the time alone with God and hear personally from Him. And the more time we take listening to God, the better we become at hearing what He is saying!

7. **While the passage doesn't really explain, why do you think Jesus calls His message the *good news* of the Kingdom of God?**

It may be helpful to say that nowhere in the Bible is the Kingdom of God clearly defined in a way that we are used to having terms defined. Put in simple terms, the kingdom of God can be understood as the reign and the rule of God. God is King.

This will be explored in more depth in the following studies. It is probable that those to whom Jesus was preaching did not have a thorough grasp of the kingdom. In fact, their ideas may have been extremely simplistic. But they probably did understand that the Kingdom of God meant God as King. And this is good news to anyone who knew anything about God. God is good, and He would be a good king, and anyone living in His kingdom would have it good. Contrast this with being under the rule a tyrannical king, who is diabolical and evil and cares nothing for his subjects. This is precisely the situation mankind is in. Satan is the ruler, the earth is his kingdom and all men and women are his subjects. (See Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 1:13) So the announcement Jesus brings, that there is going to be a change in the order and a new king will be taking over, is indeed *good news*! (See John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 3:8)

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Luke 8:1-2; 9:2; 9:11; 10:1,9

8. **What are some patterns you notice in these several summary statements? What activity seems to accompany the preaching of the Kingdom? Why do you think that is?**

John Wimber has called Jesus the "word worker". Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and then demonstrated the kingdom of God through healing and deliverance. In response to John the Baptist's question in Matthew 11, Jesus says, "Go back and report to John what you *hear and see*: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor..." (Matthew 11:4-5) These miracles are more than just a validating of Jesus' message. Healing and deliverance from demonic powers <u>is</u> the kingdom, just as much as salvation and the forgiveness of sins. This is what is expected when God's rule is established. Confusion exists because we don't see and experience healings and deliverance perfectly, every time we pray. This issue will be addressed in more depth in the following study.

9. **Jesus "passes the baton", so to speak, to His disciples: first to the twelve in Luke 9 and then to the 72 in Luke 10. Now they are to do the things that Jesus did. What are these things? In what ways do you do the things that Jesus did? Is preaching/demonstrating the Kingdom of God something you do or have even considered doing? Why or why not? How would you do it?**

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Acts 1:1-3

10. **It's been said that a person's deathbed words or their final words before leaving someone they care about are their most important. What does Luke say Jesus speaks with His disciples about for the forty days before His ascension into heaven? Does this surprise you?**

Why or why not?

11. **People have attributed many different messages to Jesus. Some say He came preaching brotherhood and love for all men. Others say He preached peace and nonviolence. Still others emphasize His message of self-sacrifice and service to God and man. What do you believe, according to the Bible, was Jesus' primary message? Why? In what ways is the good news of the Kingdom of God different from some of these other "popular" messages? If the good news of the Kingdom of God is central to the life and ministry of Jesus and you are His follower, what things in your life may need to change?**

If Jesus' message was just instructions to us on how to live better lives, that would not be good news. We are not capable of following instructions because we are sinners. And our situation is that we are living in enemy occupied territory, under the reign of a diabolical dictator. This dictator takes full advantage of our sinful natures and leads us in ways opposed to God. We are his slaves. Jesus' message is of the overthrow of this dictator's rule and the establishment of God's rule. If we are Christians, then we are no longer slaves. We have been set free! We have changed our citizenship from one kingdom to another. We have changed our allegiance from one ruler to another. The implications of all this for our lives is radical and comprehensive. The application of the message of the kingdom to our lives is known as discipleship and it is a life-long process of change from doing things our way (and Satan's way) to doing things God's way.

WRAPPING IT UP:

Hopefully, we have accomplished the goal of establishing the centrality of the Kingdom of God to the ministry of Jesus. There are numerous passages in the gospels about the kingdom that we'll be studying that should bring this whole subject into even clearer focus for us. It was important first, however, to simply establish the truth that Jesus came preaching the *good news of the Kingdom of God.* Once we understand this, then we will be able to grasp more fully everything that Jesus taught and did while He was on earth, and what impact all of that should have on us as His followers.

2

THE KINGDOM OF GOD
The Already And The Not Yet

"...In the midst of the dark and habitual chaos of earth, a light penetrates the darkness. It cannot be extinguished; it is the light of the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom has come, in His people today, and it is yet to come as well, in the great consummation of human history. While the battle rages on planet earth, we can take heart... Stop. Listen. Over the din of the conflict, if you listen carefully, you will hear the chorus echoing in the distance: "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."

Kingdoms in Conflict
Chuck Colson

"The Age to Come is still future, but we may taste the powers of that Age. Something has happened by virtue of which that which belongs to the future has become present. The powers of The Age to Come have penetrated This Age. While we still live in the present evil Age and while Satan is still the god of This Age, we may taste the powers of The Coming Age. Now a taste is not a seven-course banquet. We still look forward to the glorious consummation and fulfillment of that which we have only tasted. Yet a taste is real. It is more than promise; it is realization; it is experience."

The Gospel of the Kingdom

George Eldon Ladd

AIM OF STUDY:

To explore and apply the truth found in the scripture that the Kingdom of God has already come but *not yet* in its fullness.

KEY VERSE:

"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ." (Revelation 12:10)

OPENERS:

The Christian life is full of paradoxes: two seemingly opposite truths that must be held simultaneously. Take for example the deity of Christ. Scripture teaches that Jesus was fully man yet He was also fully God. Or consider how you were saved and became a Christian. The New Testament says that your salvation is a gift of God and that you did absolutely nothing to deserve it. Yet the Bible also says that to become a Christian, you must repent, and believe in the name of the Lord Jesus, and that to be His follower requires that you deny yourself daily, and pick up a cross. So in order to have a proper understanding of the Christian faith, it is at times necessary for us to hold two apparently opposite truths in balance.

This is particularly relevant when it comes to the Kingdom of God. Scripture clearly teaches that the Kingdom of God is something that will happen in the future *and* something that is here right now. On the one hand, at a certain time in the future, things will reach a climax. Christ will return, all mankind will be judged and the saved will enter into heaven. **This point in the future is known as *the age to come.***

On the other hand, the New Testament, and particularly the teachings of Jesus, tell us that the Kingdom of God has already come, that it is near us, it has come upon us and is even within us! Jesus performed miracles and healings to demonstrate that the Kingdom had already arrived. And He instructed His disciples to pray that the Kingdom would come to earth, as it had come in heaven. **The period of time Jesus is referring to is known as *this present age*** and it is where you and I are living.

The tension that we find in scripture concerning the Kingdom of God we also experience in our daily lives. Haven't you wondered why, when you pray, some prayers seem to be answered and others aren't, and some people are healed and others are not. Or why you sometimes feel God's blessing on your life and things are going well and other times you seem to go from one disaster to another and God feels so far away. Perhaps it is this paradox of living in this present evil age and having tastes of the age to come! It's OK for us to expect *some* of the blessings of heaven now. We just should not become discouraged when we don't receive *all* of them.

1. **Let's discuss for a moment the tension between these two truths: the future kingdom and the present kingdom, "the already but the not yet". Have you personally seen or experienced this tension? Describe.**

2. **Does understanding this tension between "this present age" and "the age to come" help you make sense of some of the difficult experiences of life? Why or why not?**

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Revelation 12:7-12

The book of Revelation is undoubtedly one of the most difficult in the Bible to understand. It is full of symbolism and speaks of events, past, present and future. The views of how this book should be interpreted range from one extreme to another. Some believe the book is entirely futuristic, dealing only with what will happen at the end of time and is therefore irrelevant to Christians' daily lives. Others believe it is entirely symbolic, which makes it extremely difficult to interpret and again, not very useful to a Christian's daily life. Our purpose in looking at Revelation is not to try to understand all of its symbolism or the chronology of the events it describes. For our study, we will simply examine the truths expressed in a few verses and apply it to our subject of the present and future nature of the kingdom of God.

Some Background Information: It is almost universally accepted among scholars that the apostle John wrote Revelation. The fact that the style is different from his other writings can be explained by the fact that John was in an unusual state of mind ("...in the Spirit" Rev. 1:10) and was writing not as an apostle but as a prophet. While the book is eschatological (dealing with the final events of human history) and is sometimes considered apocalyptic (highly symbolic and concerned with the cosmic, cataclysmic triumph of God over evil), many scholars believe it had tremendous relevance to John's readers from the first century and therefore should have relevance for us today. The early believers were of the opinion that the end was near. Christ's return was imminent and once He returned, His kingdom would be established and all evil would be done away with. But the early church began experiencing tremendous persecution and things were not getting better, they were getting worse. So John's Revelation came to them (and comes to us) as a word of encouragement and hope during times of suffering. It helps make some sense of the conflicts Christians experience because they are a part of this present age and the age to come.

3. **What is being described in verses 7-9? Who is involved? Where does it take place? Were you surprised to find Satan in heaven? There is a popular image of Satan as the king and ruler over hell. What do you think is a more biblical view of him? (See Job 1:6; Ezek. 28:14-15; 2 Chronicles 18)**

The war mentioned here in verse 7 is probably a part of what has been going on since the beginning,

when Satan first rebelled against God. (We'll be looking into who Satan is in more depth in a later study.) It is interesting that we do find Satan in heaven at all. The popular notion that Satan's domain is hell, in which he is ruler, is totally unbiblical! (see references mentioned above) His apparent familiarity with heaven and the things of God ought to make us take note and be more diligent in our study of God's Word. He is, after all, the "father of lies" and the master of subtly and distortion. If we are not well grounded in the truth, we may be easy targets for being deceived. Spiritual warfare in the Bible is usually described as occurring between us and the devil (Eph.6:12) or Jesus and the devil (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:24; 1 John 3:8). But there are also references to angels doing battle with demons, particularly Michael the archangel. (See Dan. 12:1, 10:13,21 and Jude 9.) The involvement of angels in the affairs of man is often overlooked, but should be a source of great comfort to us. They are on hand for many significant events in scripture (Mark 1:12, Luke 2:13; Luke 24:5...), bring important messages from heaven (Luke 1:11; 1:26; 2:9...), rejoice when we repent and turn to the Lord (Luke 15:7, 9), and desire to look more closely into the mysteries of the redemption of mankind (1 Peter 1:12). Here we find them fighting on our behalf and for our benefit. We are the ones enslaved and under the power of the devil, not them!

4. **What is the outcome of this war? Jesus saw this event ahead of time, in Luke 10:18, when He told His disciples, "I saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven". What do you think this means?**

There are a variety of interpretations of Satan being "hurled down". One is that it refers to Satan's original expulsion from heaven, way back before the garden. Another is that this is a very specific expulsion, that is to take place sometime in the future and will mark the beginning of a intense but short lived attack by Satan on the earth. A third possible explanation is that this expulsion is the result of Christ's victory on the cross and so has already taken place (see reference to the cross in verse 11). It seems to mark a significant (but not yet total) defeat for the enemy, since it appears that he had had some measure of access to heaven before (see Job 1 and 2 Chron. 18) but now he does not! (Again, this will be examined in more depth in a later study) We can only imagine how different heaven is now that the devil and his angels are expelled. Certainly having the enemy limited in where he can go, particularly in the spiritual realm, should be beneficial to us. How this precisely affects us as believers will be discussed more fully in following questions.

5. **How is Satan described in verse 9 and verse 10? What can you learn about him from his names?**

Referring to Satan as the great dragon, that old serpent, is clearly identifying him as the one referred to in Gen. 3, who instigated the fall of mankind by deceiving Eve in the Garden. The name devil is derived from the Greek word "diabolos" which literally means "slanderer" and accurately describes Satan's activities: the spreading of false charges and lies which damage another's character or reputation. (see verse 10) The name Satan, which means "adversary", was not originally a proper

name in the Bible, but came to be used for the devil. As with other names in the Bible, we learn a lot about what Satan does simply from the meaning of his names.

6. **There is a response in heaven to the defeat of Satan. Who is it from and what is proclaimed?**

The phrase "our brothers" in verse 10 indicates that those proclaiming are not angels, but men and women. The word "power" does not refer to physical power, but rather to authority (as in the power, or authority of the office of president). Authority here means right. The defeat of Satan has given Christ the authority or the "right to rule" and Satan has lost the power or authority he had in heaven. And the activity that Satan can no longer engage in is the continual accusation of God's people. The picture is like that of a courtroom, with Satan as prosecutor bringing up charge after charge against people before God. His defeat means that he, and all of his cases, have been thrown out of court! It is interesting that Satan's opposition to God is somewhat indirect. He doesn't slander and accuse and attack God Himself, but rather the objects of God's affection.

7. **Satan was defeated in heaven by the angels, led by Michael the archangel. But who else battles with Satan and wins in verse 11? What three ways do "they" use to overcome Satan? How do you think this verse is a source of encouragement to believers experiencing persecution and facing martyrdom?**

Christians overcome the devil first of all through the shed blood of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of sin. It is sin that gives the devil the upper hand in our lives. And there is only one remedy for sin: the blood of Christ! This is important to grasp. It is not our faith, or our repentance or our sincere remorse that deals with sin and therefore defeats Satan. It is only by the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, and our acceptance of His blood for our sin, that overcomes the devil. This is why it is the devil that encourages us to "beat ourselves" for our sin. He knows it is totally ineffective in dealing with him because it does not remove our sin. The next two ways are related. To speak up for Christ and to not be afraid to give one's life both reveal a heart that is sold out for the kingdom. If someone is hesitant to testify to Christ publicly, it is because they love their lives too much to risk it on the kingdom. The sold-out life for the kingdom deals Satan the final blow. He looses the power he has always had over men and women through the fear of death. (see Heb. 2:14-15) The resurrection of Christ does away the fear of death and likewise any fear of publicly testifying to His saving work. (see 1 Cor. 15:54-57)

8. **What does "the blood of the Lamb" refer to in verse 11? How does Christ's death on the cross break Satan's power? (See Col. 2:15) What can he no longer do because of *the blood* that he once could do? (verse 10)**

The power (authority) that Satan had over us was through sin. We are sinners. We have broken the law of God, and His law is absolute. God is holy and therefore obligated to execute justice. Satan

reminded Him of all this continually, bringing accusations about us before His throne. But once sin was dealt with through the cross and we were justified and declared righteous by trusting in Christ, the power (authority) over us that Satan once had is gone. Because of the blood, he can no longer accuse us of sin.

9. **Verse 12 indicates that this defeat of Satan is both a reason to rejoice and a reason for concern. Why? Isn't Satan "out of the picture" now? Where is Satan and what do you think he is up to? Who are his targets? Again, how would this information be helpful to the early believers who were facing persecution? How is this information helpful to you personally? Discuss.**

Satan has been decidedly defeated, yet his final judgement is yet to come. So He is not yet completely out of the picture. There is still a battle going on, and the spoils are the lives of men and women. Satan is active on earth, seeking men and women to destroy (see 1 Peter 5:8) while God is at work seeking and saving those who are lost. He is dangerous, not because of his tremendous strength and power, but because he is mad! He has been beaten and he knows it!

WRAPPING IT UP:

In this passage, we've seen a battle in heaven and the triumph of the cross over the devil. This ushers in the Kingdom of God. There is great rejoicing in heaven, because Satan has been permanently expelled. But that is not the end of the story and things are not as wonderful on earth as they are in heaven. Although the devil has been dealt a decisive blow, he is not yet "out of the picture". He is still fighting. And, according to Revelation, fighting with more anger and vengeance than ever before. Yes, a tremendous victory has been won. The Kingdom of God has come and we can experience it in part right now. But we are still dealing with Satan and his angels, the "prince of this world" (see John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; Eph. 2:2), ruler of this present age! We are part of the already but the not yet. We are living between the ages: this present age and the age to come. *(see diagram)*

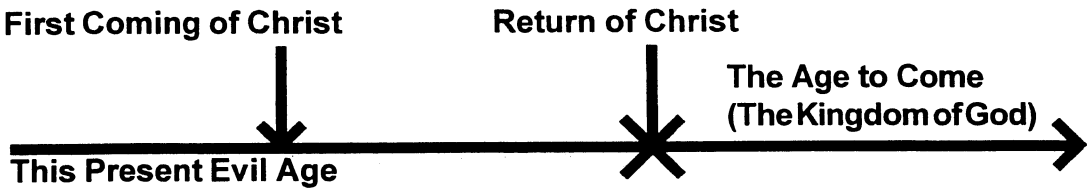
A wonderful illustration of this truth can be found in the Second World War. A decisive battle of WWII was fought and won by the allies on D-Day, June 6, 1944. But the war was not over until V-E Day, eleven months later! In between time, the fighting continued and more American lives were lost during that period than any other time during the war. Although Hitler knew he was defeated, he still continued to fight a losing battle. This is the way it is with us. Easter Sunday was our D-Day and the second coming of Christ is our V-E Day. Between these two events, the war wages on!

The words of Martin Luther's well-known hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God* is a source of encouragement for us today who are at war, caught between the ages:

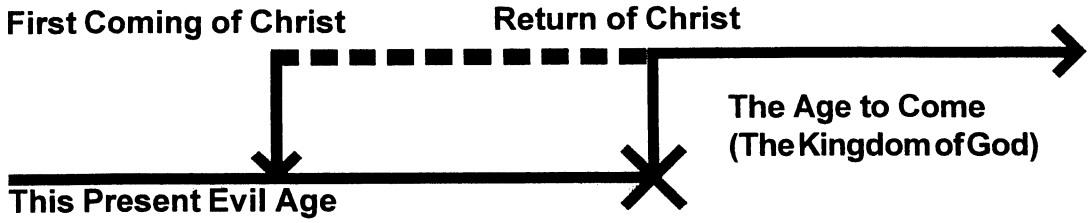
And though this world with devils filled

Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear for God has willed
His truth to triumph through us.

The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him.
His rage we can endure
For lo his doom is sure:
One little word shall fell him!



In this view, which is very common among evangelicals, the first coming of Christ brought forgiveness of sins and hope for eternal salvation, but essentially, nothing had changed. Therefore, we should not expect to experience any of the blessings of the Kingdom now, such as healing, miracles, and deliverance because the Kindom will not come until the return of Christ.



What scripture teaches, however, is that at the first coming of Christ, the Kingdom of God broke into this Present Age. Now this Present Age exists alongside the Kingdom of God. We experience "tastes" of the Kingdom, but we don't experience the fulness of the Kingdom. This is what we refer to as the *already but not yet*. At the return of Christ, the Kindom of God will be fully established, doing away with this Present Age.

3

THE KINGDOM OF GOD
The Secrets of the Kingdom

"The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that 'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.'"

Jesus Christ

"Jesus used parables to hide the truth so that He might reveal the truth. A parable would excite the concerned and stimulate them to learn more. But it would also blind the careless and, because of the condition of heart, hasten their judgment... It is not that His Word would harden their hearts so much as their hearts *were* hardened against His Word. The same sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay."

Windows on the Parables
Warren W. Wiersbe

"Jesus was not trying to be obtuse; He fully intended to be understood. Our task is first of all to try to hear what they heard. But before we can do that adequately, we must begin by looking at the question, What is a parable?"

How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth
Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart

AIM OF STUDY:

To discover the secrets or mysteries of the Kingdom of God that Jesus taught about by examining several of His parables.

KEY VERSE:

He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them." (Matthew 13:11)

OPENERS:

The fact that there are "secrets" or "mysteries" to the Christian life can be comforting to some and disconcerting to others. It can be comforting to those who realize they cannot understand everything about God or fit everything about Him neatly into little boxes. They don't mind a few of loose ends. There are others, however, who feel compelled to answer every question and dig to the bottom of every issue. So when they hear the words secrets and mysteries, they cannot rest until they know what they are.

In Deut. 29:29, it says "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." So, according to the Bible, we are to be like both groups of people. On the one hand, there are secret things that we cannot know, questions for which we won't have answers and times when we won't understand what's going on. But there are also things that we should know, questions we ought to search out the answers for and times we must pursue understanding because God has revealed the information and He intends for us to know it!

Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew 13 that He will let them in on the secrets and mysteries of the Kingdom of God. And He does this through a series of parables. It is imperative therefore for us, as His disciples 2000 years later, to make sure we understand these secrets and mysteries so that we can be obedient and "follow all the words of this law."

DEFINING OUR TERMS:

Parable: A parable is a story drawn from everyday life that is designed to illustrate a spiritual truth. The Greek word "parabole" literally means "a placing alongside". The story is placed alongside and used as a comparison with something else. It is helpful to keep a few things in mind when studying parables:

1. Study them in their context.
2. Look for *one main point.*
3. Avoid turning a parable into an allegory, in which every detail has significance (i.e. the donkey in the parable of the Good Samaritan represents "the flesh", etc.)

4. Consider the response Jesus is looking for from the parable.

Mystery or Secret: The meaning of these two words as they are used in the Bible is something which has been kept hidden (or secret) for a period of time but is now disclosed or revealed. An example of this is God's plan of redemption, which always existed, but was hidden from man's understanding until the proper time, when Christ came. (see Romans 16:25-26)

CONSIDERING THE CONTEXT:

It will be good to take into account Jesus' audience and what they thought of when they heard the words "Kingdom of God." (Matthew uses the phrase kingdom of heaven but he is still referring to the Kingdom of God. Because he was writing to Jews and it was considered irreverent by Jews to speak or write God's name, he simply substituted the word heaven for God.) The people in Jesus' day would have gotten their ideas of the kingdom from the Old Testament and there was nothing particularly secretive or hidden about these ideas. For example, Daniel interprets a dream Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has that is a good picture of what most Jews expected the Kingdom of God to be like. (see Daniel 2:27-45) In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a great statue with different parts, that Daniel interprets to represent different kingdoms of the world. A rock then comes and smashes the statue. In verse 44, we read, "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."

The idea here is that God's rule or kingdom will displace all other kingdoms and that this will take place all at once in a single, great event. All human authorities will be overthrown, and the wicked will be judged and punished. This is probably what John the Baptist believed about the kingdom of God. While he's in prison, he sends his disciples to question Jesus (see Matthew 11). His question is: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" What he's really asking is, "I don't see the complete overthrow of all human authorities and the judging of the wicked and the establishment of God's rule. So perhaps you are not the one who will usher in the kingdom."

It was into a culture with ideas and beliefs such as these that Jesus shared several parables about the kingdom. The people needed to understand what the kingdom of God was truly about so that they would not miss it when it did come! We will be looking at five different parables, each with a specific truth about the kingdom that Jesus was trying to get across to the people. Many begin with the phrase, "The kingdom of heaven or God is like_____." Jesus is not trying to say that the kingdom is literally like a mustard seed or a fishing net or a pearl. A better way to understand this phrase is, "It is like this with the Kingdom of God" or "What I am illustrating in this story is also true about the kingdom of God."

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Matthew 13:3-9; 18-23

1. **This is one of the few parables in which many of the details are significant. According to Jesus, what do the different things in this parable represent? Which details remain the same throughout the parable, and which change?**

   The message of the kingdom does not change. It is the soil, or the hearers of the message that are different.

2. **What do you think is *the main point* of this parable? How is this different from the view of the kingdom that was common in Jesus' day?**

   The main point is simply *the kingdom can be resisted.* Just because someone hears the message of the kingdom does not guarantee they will want in the kingdom! Jesus alludes to several reasons for this (which we can take as warnings) but the main point of this parable is that the kingdom can be resisted. This differed from the view of the 1st century Jews. They saw the kingdom as something that forcefully overthrew everything in its way, anything that opposed God. So it would be literally impossible for a person to resist the kingdom. The truth being illustrated by this parable would have been a totally new concept for Jesus' audience.

3. **Do you find the truth illustrated in this parable difficult to believe? Why or why not? Have you ever seen or experienced this truth in your own life? Describe.**

   This truth should be easy to believe since most of us have seen people reject the message of the kingdom and salvation in Christ. We also experience this on a personal level when we resist the Lord in an area of obedience or repentance. God does draw people to Himself, and many believe that this "call" is irresistible. But according to this parable, the truth Jesus seems to be getting at and that needs to be kept in balance is that God does not force people to believe and receive and that people can resist the message of the kingdom.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Matthew 13:24-29; 37-43

4. **Jesus explains the details of this parable as well. What do these different things represent?**

5. **What questions does this parable answer? What is Jesus' main point? How is this different from what the people listening believed about the kingdom? How does this relate to the last study about the "already but the not yet" aspect of the kingdom?**

   This parable answers in part questions regarding the existence of evil and suffering in the world. The main point is that *even though the kingdom has come, all evil has not been done away with.* There will be a period of time when both good and evil exist together, side by side! Only at the end of the

age will the wicked be judged and punished. This differs from the common viewpoint of the day, in which all the wicked would be judged and punished the instant the kingdom of God was established. This is a perfect illustration of the "already but not yet" of the kingdom. The kingdom has "already" come, but the wicked and evil are "not yet" destroyed!

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Matthew 13:31-33

6. **These two parables are teaching the same truth. What's similar about the two illustrations? (Leaven is frequently used in the Bible to represent sin or evil, but because this is a parable, it is not necessary to be consistent and interpret the leaven here to be sin.)**

They are both dealing with things that start out small. The emphasis here is not on gradual growth or slow permeation, like leaven that gradually permeates and raises the whole lump of dough, because that idea does not hold true for the mustard seed. The mustard seed grows quite rapidly into a large shrub.

7. **What is the main point, and how does it relate to the kingdom of God? What kind of response do you think Jesus is looking for? What is your response to the truth illustrated in these two parables?**

The main point is that *the kingdom of God will start out small, and will not begin like most 1st century Jews believed it would, as one grand, cataclysmic event.* We are, therefore, not to despise the kingdom just because it starts out small. And we shouldn't deceive ourselves, thinking that the kingdom is insignificant because at first it is small. The kingdom did have very humble beginnings and started out small, with one itinerant preacher and 12 men. Yet it grew (and is still growing) into God's sovereign reign and rule that will one day cover this entire planet. On a personal level, we can observe that the kingdom begins in someone's life in a very small way, but can change them so radically that they end up entirely different from the way they began. Our response therefore, should be to not despise or underestimate the power and authority of the kingdom.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Matthew 13:44-46

8. **Here again, these two short parables are illustrations of the same truth. What is the main point of them both?**
Both illustrate *the great value and worth of the kingdom of God and that to give up everything for it is not asking too much.*
9. **Consider some of the things Jesus had said in the previous parables. How again are the truths He's teaching them different from the ideas the people may have held about the kingdom all their lives? How do you think they might be feeling about what He's said?**

What significance does the main truth about *these* two parables have for them? What significance does it have for you?

Put simply, Jesus is emphasizing through these parables the "not yet" aspect of the kingdom with people who were only familiar with the "already" part. The wicked will *not yet* be judged, the kingdom with *not yet* be universally accepted, the kingdom is *not yet* over all the earth and bigger than any other existing kingdom. Perhaps the people are beginning to feel that the kingdom is not as great as they thought it was. Jesus is telling them that even though some aspects of the kingdom and the rule of God is reserved for the future, the kingdom still has tremendous value and worth and we can still give up everything for it and not loose out.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Mark 4:26-29

10. **This parable is about another sower, but the focus is not on the soil. What is the focus on? What is the main truth Jesus is getting at in this story?**

The focus here is on the seed itself and the fact that it seems to have a life of its own. The main point of this parable is that *the kingdom does not advance through the work of human hands or the efforts of men and women. It is a supernatural work of God.* We are faithful to sow the seed (spread the message) and without any work on our part, the seed sprouts and bears fruit.

11. **Consider again what Jesus' hearers thought of when they heard the words "kingdom of God". What is Jesus warning against in this parable. Why do you think it is necessary for Him to do this? How can we apply this warning to ourselves today?**

The people in Jesus' day expected the kingdom to come in all its fullness all at once. God's rule would overthrow all other rules, and the wicked would be judged and punished. The temptation is for men and women to take things into their own hands and try to "make" the kingdom come. (This is especially true when the kingdom is not coming in the way people expected it to. They aren't seeing the cosmic overthrow of everyone and everything that opposes God.) There is an aspect of the kingdom that is a supernatural work of God. It grows and expands and we have absolutely nothing to do with it. We do play a part and we do have a job to do, but we must not get our responsibilities mixed up with God's. (See 1 Cor. 3:5-7)

WRAPPING IT UP:

The kingdom of God was central to the message and mission of Jesus on this earth. It was therefore of vital importance that His followers properly understood what the kingdom was, and there were a few secrets about it that Jesus needed to clarify for them. They knew the kingdom would be the permanent establishment of God's rule, but it seems they were not clear on how this would happen and when. Jesus' parables basically illustrated for them (and for us) the same "already but not yet"

aspect of the kingdom we discussed in the previous study. The dramatic overthrow of all human and spiritual authorities and the establishment of God's rule would come, but not completely until the end of the age. In the meantime, the kingdom had still come, but it might seem small at first, like a mustard seed, and there would be weeds to deal with and it won't take root and grow in every place it's sown. We can be thankful for the knowledge of these secrets, because, "Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance."

4

THE KINGDOM OF GOD
The Clash of Two Kingdoms

"There are different ways to look at things. The way psychiatrists are most accustomed to understand human beings is in terms of health and disease. This viewpoint is known as the medical model. It is a very useful and effective way of looking at people. [But] how would it seem if we viewed [things] instead in terms of a traditional Christian religious model? According to this model, humanity (and perhaps the entire universe) is locked in a titanic struggle between the forces of good and evil, between God and the devil. The battleground of this struggle is the individual human soul. The entire meaning of human life revolves around the battle. The only question of ultimate significance is whether the individual soul will be won to God or won to the devil."

People of the Lie
M. Scott Peck, M.D.

"God is the Lord of history; but there are hostile elements, opposing forces which seek to frustrate God's rule. It is not the biblical view that . . . all of history moves toward the Kingdom of God. There are demonic forces manifest in history and in human experience which move against the Kingdom of God. Evil is not merely absence of the good, nor is it a stage in man's upward development; it is a terrible enemy of human well-being and will never be outgrown or abandoned until God has mightily intervened to purge evil from the earth."

The Presence of the Future
George Eldon Ladd

AIM OF STUDY:

To see that scripture teaches there are just two kingdoms: God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom, and that these two kingdoms are at war. (Spiritual warfare will be looked at in more depth in another series of studies.)

KEY VERSE:

"But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come to you." (Luke 11:20)

OPENERS:

To say that the world today is full of strife and conflict and war is hardly controversial. There is fighting and unrest in almost every country on this planet! But to attribute the fighting to just two opposing forces is very controversial. After all, aren't there economic factors and racial factors and political factors to take into account? And there are so many different groups with so many different agendas. To say there are only two sides to all this conflict is really being overly simplistic.

But according to scripture, there are only two parties involved. The real war behind all the earth's battles is between just two opposing kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Every person on earth belongs to one kingdom or the other. Because of sin and our natural rebellion to God, all of us begin as part of the kingdom of Satan. By accepting Christ, our citizenship can be transferred from Satan's kingdom to God's. (see Eph. 2:1-7; Col. 1:13-14)

The bible teaches that Satan's sphere of influence is this world. Jesus calls him the prince of this world and says he has his own kingdom. Paul calls him the god of this world. John says in Revelation that he leads the *whole world* astray. Satan is the ruler of this world, and in Psalm 2, David describes how this world feels about God:
"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One...."
The battle is simple. It's all the world against God! And the world in under the reign and rule of Satan.

When Satan was in the wilderness tempting Jesus, he offered Him all the kingdoms of world. He could do this because they were his to give. They were under his influence and his control. In the end, Jesus gets all the kingdoms of the earth, but it is by way of the cross that He gets them, and not by bowing the knee to the devil.* It is interesting to note a small difference between these two accounts in the New Testament. In Matthew and Luke, the devil offers Jesus all the *kingdoms* of the world. In Revelation 12, when victory is declared, it says that "The *kingdom* of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." Under Satan, the kingdoms of the world are divided, but under God, they will be united.
*It may be necessary to go over again and clarify for people "the already and the not yet" of the kingdom. The cross was a decisive victory over Satan and it did usher in the kingdom of God. But

the consummation of the kingdom is yet to come and this includes the final and complete judgement of Satan. In the meantime, the two kingdoms are still at war.

1. **In what ways to see this truth of two kingdoms at war in the world today?**

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Luke 11:14-23

The casting out of demons was Jesus' direct, frontal attack on the kingdom of Satan and it is mentioned often in the gospels. The demons being expelled often asked Him if He was going to destroy or torture them (i.e. Mark 5:7; Luke 4:34) to which Jesus' unspoken answer was a resounding YES! (see 1 John 3:8)

2. **What do you observe about the activity of the demon in this man's life? Compare briefly with Matthew 9:32; 12:22; 16:23; Mark 9:17-18,25, Luke 8:2; 13:11,16; Luke 22:3; Acts 5:3; 16:16. Often the mental image we have of someone afflicted by a demon is similar to the demoniac in Mark 5:1-5. What is a more accurate view of demonic activity according to the New Testament? What are some of the things it could include?**

There is much confusion over the nature of demonic activity and some of it is due to the terminology that is used. The Greek word diamonizomai doesn't have a neat English translation and so the term demon-possession has been adopted. A good biblical example of demon-possession is the demoniac found in Mark 5. Here is someone so under the influence of demons that he is out of control. There are cases like this, no doubt, today. But this is not the only way demons exert influence on people, and there are other examples in scripture which include a wide variety of other "symptoms". So the use of the word demon-possession is inadequate because it does not accurately describe the wide range of influence demons have on people. It is also problematic because it cannot refer to Christians. Christians cannot be "possessed" by a demon because they have been bought by God and belong to Him. Yet Christians can experience demonic influence in their lives. A better way to translate diamonizomai is *demonized* (simply the verb form of the word demon) and to not include the notion of "possession". Demonization therefore can include the wide range and varying degrees of influence evil spirits exert over individuals. Take particular note that demonization can cause physical ailments and not just mental anguish or emotional problems as is often believed.

3. **What are the different reactions to Jesus by the people watching? Compare their reactions to the notion that "seeing is believing". Is "seeing" always "believing'? Why or why not? Put yourself at the scene. What might your reaction have been?**

Here is an example how people can witness the same event and arrive at wildly different conclusions. An explanation for these differences is the different presuppositions the people had before ever seeing

the event. Another way to think of it is that people all have on different "glasses" through which they look out at the world and interpret everything. Some, because they wear anti-supernatural glasses, will never acknowledge that something miraculous could happen, even if it does right before their eyes. The reactions in this account are very similar to the reactions one would expect to find today to a miracle. Some would be amazed and not know how to explain it. Some would attribute it to evil sources. And still others would not acknowledge a miracle had even taken place (i.e., they weren't really that sick anyway) and would ask for a sign! The goal is to make sure we are not wearing any glasses ourselves and are able to look honestly at both the scriptures and events. There are several possible meanings to the word translated Beelzebub. One is that it is a derivative of the name for the god of Ekon found in 2 Kings 1:2 which means "lord of the flies". Another possible explanation is that is comes from a similar sounding word that means "lord of the dung" which was used by Jews to refer to heathen deities and later became associated with the devil. This same word was also found on some ancient tablets and was the name of a Canaanite deity, meaning "lord of the dwelling". This last meaning could have been the reason Jesus goes on to discuss a strong man and his house!

4. **As in other places in the gospels, Jesus knows their thoughts about Him here and in verses 17-20, He responds. How does He respond and what do you think the people's reaction might have been?**

The two basic points Jesus makes are rather obvious: 1) if the forces of evil were casting out demons, then they were destroying themselves and 2) if casting out demons means you're in league with the devil, what does that say about "your followers", who supposedly also cast out demons. In Mark we know there were Pharisees in the crowd, so He may have been referring to their disciples. Either Jesus is pointing out their hypocrisy about exorcisms they were performing or making a joke about exorcisms that weren't occurring at all, which suggested a lack of power and authority on the part of the Pharisees. Here Jesus clearly states that Satan has a kingdom of his own and that the expulsion of demons is a threat to that kingdom.

5. **What bold statement does Jesus make in verse 20. Where else is the phrase "finger of God" used in the Bible? What is the significance of Jesus' statement?**

This phrase was used by Pharaoh's magicians in Exodus 8:19. Moses had inflicted upon the Egyptians the plague of gnats and for the first time, the magicians were unable to reproduce the plague. They recognized the power of God and acknowledged it. In contrast, the crowd watching Jesus did not acknowledge the power of God. This statement may have sounded especially condemning to the Pharisees in the crowd, who would have been familiar with the story. (Note that Jesus does not directly address the group who asked Him for a sign and did not acknowledge that anything miraculous had taken place. Jesus' silence may imply that there were really only two alternatives: the source was Satan or the source was God.) The significance of Jesus' statement is that what He was doing was direct warfare with the kingdom of Satan. And if He was defeating Satan's

kingdom, then God's kingdom had arrived! It wasn't the "sign" of the deliverance that marked the arrival of the kingdom, but the overthrow of one rule by another rule. Satan's reign and rule had been overthrown by the reign and rule of another: God.

6. **Describe the picture that Jesus uses in verses 21-22 to illustrate how God's kingdom does battle with Satan's kingdom. What does everything represent? Luke says here that the stronger man attacks and overpowers the strong man, and takes away his armor. In Matthew and Mark, it says he ties up the strong man. What do you think Jesus is alluding to in these phrases?**

In this illustration, the strong man is Satan, the house is his kingdom and his possessions are probably men and women. Someone stronger is Jesus. It is possible that there was a significant blow to Satan during his unsuccessful temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. This may be why Jesus allowed Himself to be tempted before ever beginning His public ministry. It was necessary for Him to first overpower Satan, to bind him and to take away his "armor". The armor that Jesus refers to here may be the armor of lies and deceit, which is what Satan has always used to enslave and capture his "possessions". By using the truth of the Word of God in battle, Jesus essentially took away the power of Satan's lies. Jesus also overpowered Satan during the temptation (and throughout His entire ministry) by remaining sinless. It is sin in our lives that gives the devil a foothold, but the sinlessness of Christ took away the devil's power. (John 14:30). When Jesus says that the strong man's spoils will be divided up (Matthew and Mark say the strong man is robbed), He could be referring to the great number of people who were set free from demonic influence and control.

7. **Jesus seems to change the subject here and makes another bold statement in verse 23. What does it mean? How do you think it ties in with what Jesus had just previously said? How comfortable or uncomfortable does the idea of just two kingdoms at war make you feel?**

To put it bluntly, Jesus is saying that you're either in or out. You're either part of His kingdom or part of Satan's. There is no middle ground, no neutral territory. The connection with the previous verses may be that this statement is a response to their thoughts again, which Jesus always seems to know. Perhaps they are comforting themselves with the thought that they have nothing to do with Satan and this messy business of demons, yet they are very noncommittal about Jesus. He is telling them that that is an impossible position! If they don't commit to him, then they are automatically part of Satan's kingdom.

Jesus makes almost the exact opposite statement in Luke 9:50, but that is because the situation is entirely different. The disciples are arguing among themselves about who is the greatest and Jesus confronts them with a child, saying that a child is an example of someone who is great. Then John reports that someone is casting out demons and because he is not one of them, he should be stopped. Jesus again speaks to their pride, telling them that just because someone is not one of them does not

also mean they are not part of the kingdom. The thing to consider and look for is whether they are helping the cause of Christ or hurting the cause of Christ. And since this man was waging war on Satan's domain and casting out demons, he was helping the cause of Christ, and therefore was for Jesus and the disciples.

WRAPPING IT UP:

Christian author Frank Peretti has creatively illustrated this clash of the kingdoms in his books *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*. In these fictional accounts of everyday trials and tribulations, we see behind the scenes spiritual forces at work, waging war on each other. The goal of each side is to expand their respective spheres of influence and so include more and more people. There are no by-standers in this war. There are no neutral territories. Everyone is a part, whether willingly or unwillingly; knowingly or in ignorance. So as Christians, we are at war and are engaged in combat. But we can have hope and comfort because we know the end of the story! We know that God's kingdom will prevail over the kingdom of Satan.

"And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown in the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." Revelation 20:10

5

THE KINGDOM OF GOD
The Demand Of The Kingdom

"... what are you going to do with the command of our Lord Jesus Christ....Is Christ really Lord of your life? Have you submitted your will to Him? Your future? Your vocation?...Christ is asking you tonight to renounce your plans, your goals, your ambitions and your motives, and He asks you to put His plans first, make His goals your top priority. He asks that your ambitions and motives become His...To serve Christ will cost you."

That I Might Believe and Obey
Urbana '79
Billy Graham

"When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."

The Cost of Discipleship
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

AIM OF STUDY:

To examine the demands and costs of the Kingdom of God and to apply these to our personal lives.

KEY VERSE:

Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62)

OPENERS:

No one likes to consider the cost of something. This is particularly true today, in the age of the credit card! We are able to get what we want right now and not pay the bill for weeks or even months. The cost of all these things we buy doesn't need to be considered now because paying the cost can be postponed until later.

No one likes to make sacrifices anymore, either. Today we want to "have it all". We want the high-paying career without all the years of hard work in school preparing for that career. We want the joy of children without all time and effort necessary to raise them. We want to look like fashion models without the discipline of dieting and exercise. We really aren't willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to "have it all".

Counting the cost and making sacrifices may not be popular activities today, they are both required of anyone interested in the kingdom of God. Jesus is quite clear about this throughout the gospels. In fact, He may be too clear for our twentieth century ears! We want the gospel candy-coated so it will be easy for us to swallow. Talk of sacrifice and radical obedience to Christ does not easily fit into our modern life styles. But then such talk never fit into any life style at any point in history. Jesus' call to His disciples in the first century was just as radical to them as His call is to us today.

Now it is true that the kingdom of God is not something we enter through merit. We cannot earn our way into heaven by being radical and making the most sacrifices. It's a free gift from God. The demand of the kingdom, and the demand for those who wish to be a part of it however is costly. It involves personal sacrifice. It will cost us everything!

The reason Jesus could make such high and radical demands on us is because His kingdom is worth it. Throughout history, people have given their lives to things only to discover in the end that it wasn't worth it. We will never feel that way about the kingdom of God. No price we may be asked to pay and no sacrifice we may be asked to make will be too much for Him and for His kingdom.

1. **What has been your understanding of the cost of being a disciple of Jesus? How did you arrive at your understanding (i.e. taught in church, reading a book, talking with friends, the bible)? Did you consider the cost of being a disciple when you first decided to become a Christian? Discuss.**

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Luke 9:57-62

In this passage we are privy to three short but to the point conversations Jesus had with would-be followers. The specifics of this situation seem irrelevant to Luke, such as where they are and who they are. (Matthew gives a bit more information in his account of the same conversations.) We'll look at each person separately.

2. **Describe the situation in verses 57-58. What does this man volunteer to do? How does Jesus respond to this man?**

This man was speaking without thinking. He did not know what following Jesus really meant. He may have been caught up in the excitement of the moment and so enthusiastically but ignorantly volunteers to join up with Jesus. In Matthew's account, we learn that this man is a teacher of the law. He may have correctly recognized that Jesus was the Christ, but misunderstood the nature of His kingdom. He may have imagined that if he attached himself to the Messiah, he would be a part of a dynamic overthrow of all the kingdoms of the world and the establishment of God's kingdom. When Jesus was given His kingdom, things would be grand and glorious! Wherever He went, He would be crowned king, and this man wanted to be there with Him! If this is so, then this man's motives for volunteering were wrong. Jesus always knows what each person really needs. He gives this man a good dose of reality. He tells him what he will really have to look forward to as a follower of the Son of Man. The title "Son of Man" was used by Jesus 81 times in the gospels to refer to Himself. He was the only one who used this title this way. The Son of Man is a figure from the Old Testament who, at the end of time, is given authority, glory and power by God. This man, as a teacher of the law, would undoubtedly be familiar with the title Son and Man and its connotations. Jesus may have used the title here to affirm the man's recognition of Him as Messiah. It was the man's ideas about the nature of the reign of the Messiah in this world that were incorrect.

3. **Jesus seems to be trying to discourage this man from following Him. This is totally opposite to today's methods of church growth, methods which try to entice people to join by making things as comfortable and inviting for them as possible! What do you think Jesus' statement means and why do you think He said it? What are the implications of following someone who is homeless?**

The most obvious meaning to Jesus' statement is that He, as the Son of Man, will not enjoy what many believe to be the basic necessities of life. Jesus will not have a home, and so likewise, neither will anyone who follows Him. It is humiliating to be without a home and so following Jesus will sometimes be a humiliating experience.

Jesus is not being literal here, because we know that He literally did find places to lay His head while on earth. We aren't to literally be without a house to live in. The emphasis is on Jesus' inability to call any place here His own, His home, His real home. This statement is certainly consistent with other scriptures concerning our inability to call this world our real home (see Matthew 6:19-21; Heb.

11:8-10; 13:14; 1 Peter 1:1). The followers of God are to be detached from this world and the things of this world. Followers of God are not to feel at home in this world because this world is not their permanent home.

The statement Jesus makes in verse 58 is perhaps a stark contrast to the mental image this man may have had of Jesus as Messiah. He may have pictured Jesus as the conquering hero, ruling nations from a palatial castle. And this may be precisely why Jesus used such graphic and down to earth language to respond to the man. This man needed to understand that Jesus' kingdom was not of this earth and so being a part of it was no joy ride!

The implications of Jesus' statement are manifold. In general, the Christian ought to hold onto material possessions, jobs, status, etc. with a loose grip and be willing to release any of it for the Lord and His kingdom.

4. **The next man does not volunteer but instead is asked by Jesus to follow Him. What is the man's response? What is Jesus' response back to him? What does Jesus' statement mean?**

Literally, what Jesus is saying is, "Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead.." What this man was to do was proclaim or announce the kingdom, which had to do with life and was therefore to have priority over the burial of the dead.

5. **How do you think Jesus prioritized the responsibilities of life? How do you? What might Jesus say to you today in response to your priorities?**

To understand the impact of Jesus' statement here, it is important to know the place burial of the dead played in Jewish culture. According to Jewish custom of the day, burial of the dead was to take priority over all other religious obligations, such as study of the Law, temple service, killing the Passover lamb, circumcision. This was particularly true of a close relative, the closest of which would be the father. (In such cases, Levites were even permitted to touch the dead body of a close relative. See Lev. 21:1-3) So the burial of a father would have been considered the highest religious duty of the day. The man's request from a human perspective was entirely reasonable. When Jesus tells him that proclaiming the kingdom is to take priority over burying his father, He is giving it the place of highest priority to the first century Jew.

Some believe the man's father was not yet dead because if he was dead, the man would have been busy with the responsibilities of burial. What he was really asking then was if he could wait until his father had died before leaving home to follow Jesus. We have no way of knowing if this is the case, but even so, Jesus' response still confronts the man with the ultimate priority the kingdom deserves to have.

Matthew identifies this man as a disciple in his account. This makes sense because Jesus tells the man

to proclaim the kingdom. He cannot proclaim something he knows nothing about. We can assume the man has seen and experienced something of the power of the kingdom of God. Now, telling others about the kingdom was to have first priority in his life, even over other worthwhile responsibilities. What makes the call of Jesus so difficult is that it doesn't compete with the meaningless activities of life but rather with the very important.

6. **In verse 61, what is this third man's request of Jesus? What do you think this request reveals about him?**

It is very probable that there was more to this man's request than permission to say a simple good-bye. There seems to be a hesitancy on his part to make a clean, clear-cut decision for Christ. Perhaps he fears his family's reaction if he *doesn't* return home. Perhaps he wants to discuss his decision to follow Jesus with them. Perhaps he still needs to gain their approval and blessing for whatever he does. His loyalties may be divided between Jesus and his family. He wants to somehow please both, make Jesus happy and keep his family happy at the same time. It cannot be done!

7. **How does Jesus respond to this man? What does His statement mean? What, if any, are the competing loyalties in your life?**

Jesus statement is strangely similar to the story of Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21. In that story, Elisha is given permission to return home to say good-bye to his family before setting off to follow Elijah. (Interestingly, Elisha is plowing at the time of Elijah's visit.) In contrast, however, Jesus does not give this man permission to do the same. The call of the kingdom is above the call of Elijah.

Now it is wrong to conclude that once someone chooses to follow Jesus, all previous relational ties *must* be severed abruptly. (See Luke 5:27-29) Neither is Jesus advocating rudeness here, suggesting that His followers are to always leave without saying good-by. What He's getting at is the absolute claim the kingdom of God is to have on a person's life, over and above all previous claims. There is nothing anymore that is to come "first", before the kingdom. The only legitimate competing claim that most people have to deal with is that of their family. Family loyalty is valued in almost all cultures. But the demand of the kingdom is to come before family.
Jesus is saying here that this man does not meet the standard expected and required of someone in the kingdom. This man has apparently already put his hand to the plow, so to speak, but is now looking back. Such practice would produce uneven furrows in farming, so no good farmer would do it. How much more important is the kingdom of God than farming? The phrase "looks back" is reminiscent of Lot's wife, who longingly looked back on Sodom and all the worldly possessions and pleasures she would lose, and was subsequently judged. But family loyalties cannot be compared to worldly pleasures. The issue is of allegiance and obedience. Who will now have the say in your life? To whom do you feel obligated to obey? Whose opinions matter the most? Anyone who is looking back over their shoulder, wondering what someone else thinks of their decisions for God, does not have the single-minded, whole-hearted kind of devotion that Jesus is looking for.

WRAPPING IT UP:

Following Jesus is a major decision in life. It is not something to be considered lightly, because the ramifications of dealing with the living God are endless! Jesus warns people in the gospels of the seriousness of it. He quickly sees through shallow commitments and half-hearted promises. His calling to people is a high calling, one that requires radical obedience. Many of the things that we are required to leave behind when following Christ are not worthy of a second thought. But other things, such as family relationships, are much more difficult. God's intention is not to destroy all family ties wherever they exist, because the family is something He instituted and blessed. What He's interested in is people who place nothing before or higher in their lives than His kingdom. First place is the only place the kingdom of God rightly deserves.

For further study, consider Matthew 10:34-39; 19:16-24.