

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

Matthew 4:13–25 • Brian Brodersen

Introduction: As we come to the New Testament, we come to the Story of the Kingdom. The Lord had spoken through Malachi, the last of the prophets, promising to send his Messenger ahead of his Own arrival at his Temple. Yet, 400 years have passed, and things for Israel have only gone from bad to worse. They have spent most of these years under oppressive rule from foreign powers—the Ptolemais, Seleucids, and Romans, as well as domestic oppressors: the Hasmoneans—priest/kings, and the corrupt High Priestly rulers who followed after Herod became king in 37 BC.

A diabolical idea develops during the time of the Hasmoneans that would deny a future Davidic kingdom and replace it with this new priest/king order. According to the Hasmoneans, there was no need to expect a future king from the house of David; the High Priest and his family were the new and permanent rulers.

Back in the days of the Ptolemaic rulers (Cleopatra was the last Ptolemaic monarch), most of the descendants of David had been relocated to Alexandria, Egypt. The absence of David's descendants in the land would naturally diminish the expectation of any possible rise of the house of David in the future. Yet the common people held fast to those promises and hoped for Messiah, Son of David, to come.

Matthew (Levi) begins his Gospel with these words: “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

After describing the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, Matthew then introduces John the Baptist (a priest descended from Aaron), announcing not the replacement of the Davidic line by the High Priestly family, but the arrival of the Davidic King!

Matthew's Gospel has been referred to by many as the Gospel of the Kingdom. He seems to write with his fellow Jews as his primary audience. Matthew quotes from the Old Testament extensively and uses the phrase “It is written,” pointing back to the Jewish Scripture.

Even in the Sermon on the Mount, we see a Jewish context. There Jesus says, “Do not think I have come to destroy the Law and the Prophets ...” And, “You have heard it was said by those of old ...” He then quotes from the Old Testament.

Finally, Eusebius, the early church historian, says that Matthew originally wrote his Gospel to the Jews in the Hebrew language.

READ 4:12–25

I. The King Proclaims the Kingdom

- A. Repent: to undergo a change of mind. To change direction. Repent is a good word. It is an invitation to turn from the wrong way to the right way. In this case, it would be to turn and follow the King.
- B. The kingdom of heaven is near. “The kingdom is here”! (Message)

Because we've focused so much on the kingdom coming when Christ returns, we've often failed to realize the kingdom is already here. It came with Jesus when he came the first time, and if you've received Jesus (the King), you've entered the kingdom.

II. The King Demonstrates the Kingdom

- A. Healing every disease and sickness among the people ... those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed. He cleanses the leper, he gives sight to the blind, he calms the raging storm, he feeds the hungry multitude, he raises the dead!

Jesus said of himself, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free ...” Luke 4:18

My favorite description of Jesus’ ministry: “He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.” Act 10:38

III. The King Calls His Subjects to Follow in His Ways

- A. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and *learn* from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart ...”
- B. Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted for his sake.
- C. Forgiveness: Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.
- D. Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.
- E. Love one another, as I have loved you.
- F. Do not be like the hypocrites—the way of honesty, integrity, authenticity.
- G. Servanthood—the great among the unbelievers lord over, not so with you. The greatest among you will be your servant. I am among you as one who serves.
- H. For many, this was not the kingdom they expected or wanted. All this talk about gentleness and humility, forgiving and loving your enemies, being a servant ... No, they wanted to see their enemies crushed and made their servants. They wanted a king who would attend to their material and social needs, not someone who’s priorities were meekness, mercy, and purity.

IV. The King Opens the Way to the Kingdom

- A. “Jesus cried out in a loud voice and gave up his spirit. At that moment, the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” The veil that separated the Holy God from sinful humans was torn. Jesus opened the way through his death and resurrection.

V. The King Sends His Ambassadors

- A. Go, make disciples of all nations (ethnos), baptizing and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. Spread this kingdom as far and wide as possible!
- B. All power is given to Me; You shall receive power ...

Communion

The way into the kingdom. The New Covenant. Body broken for you, blood shed for you. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

Additional Notes

The Intertestamental Period

The Book of Malachi, which closes the Old Testament Canon, was written in approximately 430 BC. At that time, most of the Israelites that had been led away captive by the Assyrians in 721 BC remained dispersed. The situation with Judah was different. After the Babylonian captivity of 607–538 BC, significant numbers of Jews returned to Judah and under the Persian rulers, rebuilt the temple, and later, the city. Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi are all names associated with this period. Under the Persians, once Jerusalem was reestablished, the people lived in relative peace and prosperity for about 100 years.

Then came the Greeks under Alexander the Great. When Alexander conquered Persia, he began the process of Hellenizing the empire, which included Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Hellenization is the imposition of Greek culture upon non-Greek societies.

“Lands were conquered and cities were founded with features that reflected Alexander’s homeland: theaters, gymnasiums, schools, and municipal government. A universal monetary currency was established. Above all, Greek became the new language of a new world that united the cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Mediterranean. Literature, commerce, medicine, religion, philosophy and mathematics all used Greek.”

The Greek influence continued to spread even after Alexander’s death in 323 through his successors in Egypt and Syria and other regions.

The Ptolemais in Egypt ruled the region that included Israel for the next 122 years, 320–198 BC. This was again a relatively peaceful time for the Jews and Jerusalem. Hellenization among the Jews increased at this time. So great was the Greek-speaking population among the Jews that there arose the need for a Greek translation of the Scriptures—The Septuagint—The LXX. Seventy scholars over seventy-two days, produced in Alexandria and paid for by King Ptolemy Philadelphus.

In 198 BC, the Seleucids in Syria took power from the Ptolemais over Judea and Jerusalem. In 168, Antiochus IV, humiliated by the Romans in a failed effort to increase his hold on Egypt, returning home, passed through Jerusalem where he met a Jewish rebellion with brutal retaliation.

He sacked the city, tore down its walls and looted the temple treasury. He made decrees prohibiting temple festivals and religious ceremonies such as circumcision, and it became illegal to possess the Jewish Scriptures. The worship of the Greek gods became mandatory, and soon festivals for the god Dionysus could be seen in Jerusalem’s streets. In the winter of 167 the temple was turned over the worship of Zeus, and for three years Greeks sacrificed pigs on Israel’s holy altar.

As a result, the Hasidim (the pious ones), led by a priest named Mattathias and his sons, rose up in opposition to Antiochus’ forces in what is known as the Maccabean revolt. In December 164, Judas Maccabeus (the hammer) liberated and cleansed the temple. That event is remembered since then in the celebration of Hanukkah.

From the Maccabees arose a line of mostly corrupt priest/kings who would ultimately seek to replace the Davidic monarchy and rule the nation permanently, they were known as the Hasmoneans. They would conquer and impose harsh Jewish rule over Damascus and the other cities of the Decapolis. They were

constantly warring among themselves, plotting, scheming, and even murdering one another. This lasted until the Romans under Pompey came and subjugated them in 63 BC.

Even under Roman rule, the Hasmoneans remained in power until the time of Herod the Great. Herod, who was an Idumean (Edomite) and married to a Hasmonean princess, was made king over Judea by the Romans at the request of Mark Antony. Israel bore very little resemblance to what it had been when the last of the prophets had spoken 400 plus years earlier. But there was a remnant among the common people whose hearts longed for deliverance. It is to these the Good News is about to come.