

I. Read Luke 17:20-21

- A. The kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future hope yet to be fulfilled. In other words, it is being realized progressively in stages. What circumstance represents the antithesis of the perfect fulfillment of the kingdom of God? (See Genesis 6:1-5.)

The antithesis or opposite of the fulfillment of the kingdom of God is a time in which evil progressed unhindered in the world and in the hearts of men, such as that described in Genesis 6:5.

- B. Read Romans 8:18-25 and discuss how the Apostle Paul is describing the effects of the Fall and the perfect realization of the kingdom of God.

Here Paul describes all of creation as suffering under a curse. The curse is sin and its consequences which occurred at *the Fall*. Apart from the coming of God's kingdom, there is no hope for God's creation. The whole of God's creation anticipates redemption. This final redemption is portrayed in microcosm in the redemption of individuals. The healing and restoration that occurs in the heart of a believer will one day occur throughout God's creation. Yet, even believers must wait for the redemption of their body at the final resurrection. (See 1 Corinthians 15:50-54.) The final stage of the redemption of all creation and the final fulfillment of the kingdom of God are the same thing.

- C. In what way is "the kingdom of God...within" (NKJV) a believer?

First of all, the kingdom of God is present because we are created anew at our conversion (2 Corinthians 5:17). Whereas we were once subject to and under the dominion of the "power of darkness," we are now subjects of His Kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14). Being a new creation has both internal and external implications. Externally or outside of us, we have a real citizenship in the kingdom of God (Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20). Internally or within our hearts, sin no longer rules us, but now Christ the Lord rules by faith (Galatians 2:20).

Secondly, the Kingdom of God is present "within" the believer as the rule of Christ is manifest in our behavior and attitudes. Thus, the Kingdom of God can actually be witnessed by others as they see *its effects* in our lives.

Thirdly, the Kingdom of God is an irrevocable gift that can never be taken away or "shaken" (Hebrews 12:28). In this regard, it is an absolute surety that is unchanging. Note: The NAS version translates "within you" as "in your midst," thus conveying the present reality of the kingdom of God.

- D. Jesus said "The kingdom of God does not come with observation, nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!'" How are we to understand these remarks?

They must be understood in the context in which they were spoken. That is, Jesus was speaking to Jews who were expecting the Messiah to return and overthrow the yoke of Roman rule. They thought the Messiah would establish an immediate and absolute *political kingdom* in Israel, subjecting all other nations to Jewish rule. Jesus was explaining to the Jews that the kingdom of God had indeed come, but in a different manner than they had expected.

How did the Pharisees' understanding of the kingdom of God prove too narrow and limited when compared to the coming of the true kingdom of God?

1. **The Pharisees thought primarily in terms of political temporal power. God's power (and thus the kingdom's power) is far greater and covers all dimensions and realms of creation.**
2. **The Pharisees saw the kingdom of God as being limited to the nation of Israel. God's kingdom cannot be limited to one nation or people. (Galatians 3:8-9) The election of Israel as God's chosen people was merely a preliminary stage in God's unveiling of the kingdom. Israel was a *type* of the visible and invisible church.**
3. **The Pharisees failed to see that the coming kingdom would reverse the effects of the Fall. God's redemption of individuals and all creation corresponds with His coming kingdom.**

How do some evangelical Christians make the same mistake the Jews and Pharisees made regarding the kingdom of God?

There are some who think America is the kingdom of God in much the same way the Jews thought of Israel. Some mistakenly assume that God's kingdom is advanced primarily through the ballot box, thus they look for redemption through political means. Some fail to understand the *cosmic significance* of what happens as individual believers conform to the rule of Christ in their own hearts. God's priorities and ours are often different. Each time a believer reflects the rule of God's kingdom through his behavior, attitude, or willingness to obey, the domain of the powers of darkness is shaken! C. S. Lewis illustrated this in his series entitled *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

- E. There are some who think of God's kingdom exclusively as something that will happen in the future. What is wrong with this?

This is an error common to *dispensational* premillennialism. The problem is that it necessarily denigrates what occurred at the cross (Satan was truly defeated there, though he continues to deceive) and typically undervalues what is happening right now in God's kingdom. The emphasis is all on the return of Christ and the supposed literal 1000 year kingdom they expect will be established then. We *should* look ahead to the day of Christ's return, for in that day, the kingdom will be fully realized. But we must not forget that the kingdom is being built now as well. It is not only a future hope; it is also a present reality.

- F. Comment on the statement, "The kingdom of God is now, but it is not yet."

This is simply an expression of the fact that God's kingdom is being implemented in stages. The first stage occurred during Jesus' public ministry and the cross. The second stage began with His resurrection. The third stage begins at His return. We are in the second stage according to this eschatological schema.

- G. According to Jesus, how should we pray for God's kingdom? (See Matthew 6:9-10.)

Pray for His kingdom to come and that the law and rule of that kingdom be progressively realized here on earth, as it is perfectly in heaven.