

A New Community

Key Verse: “*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*”
—*Matthew 3:2*

Selected Scripture:
Mark 1:1-8;
Matthew 3:1-12

THE PHRASE ‘KINGDOM OF heaven’ from our key verse is peculiar to the book of Matthew, and signifies the Messianic rule of Jesus Christ, the son of David. It is called this because it is the rule of the heavens over the earth. (Matt. 6:10) This phrase is derived from Daniel where it is defined, “The stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.”—Dan. 2:34-36

As the scripture also points out to us, the first step in being part of this kingdom involves the act of repentance, which brings a believer back to the favor and blessings of God. It is a call to reform. It is saying, in substance, examine your life and your way of living. If you are not living up to the standard of life which you are capable of, then you are guilty. John here was speaking to the people of Israel. As he spoke, he realized that in most cases they were not in the proper condition of heart to be a part of the kingdom of heaven. Because of this, as a nation, Israel’s opportunity to have that kingdom was taken away from them and given to a new nation, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood. “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but

are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”—I Pet. 2:9.10

John’s mission was to announce the kingdom of God, for which the Jews had been waiting for centuries. It was an announcement that the fulfillment of the Divine promise was at hand. Repentance from recognized sin, violations of the Law Covenant, and a return to a condition of righteousness of heart was being stressed. Further, the preaching and baptism of John were a special call to God’s people to remind them of their failure as a nation, and as individuals to live up to their covenant. “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”—Mark 1:4

The Lord commenced his ministry with exactly the same announcement, “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 4:17) Not only was the kingdom the topic with which the Lord began his ministry, but it was the main topic of all his preaching. The apostles were sent forth with the same message.—Luke 9:2

The kingdom of heaven has three aspects in Matthew—the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist, the virtual rejection of the King, and the announcement of a new brotherhood to be called during the present age. (Matt. 3:2; 13:1-52) These are called out of the world of mankind to be associated with the Lord in his Millennial Kingdom. The message respecting the kingdom took on a special form. It became an invitation to become joint-heirs with the Messiah, and heirs of the kingdom. This would lead to the beginning of a new community, which would include the disciples of that day, and his disciples all through the Gospel Age. It points out that a certain class is permitted to join with their Redeemer in his sacrifice and sufferings in order to be granted a share in the glorious work of his kingdom. ■