What is the kingdom of heaven? What is the kingdom of God?

In the widest scope of things, the *whole universe* is God's Kingdom. God is THE Supreme Ruler and there is nothing and no one that is higher than or apart from His sphere of rule. But that isn't what is meant by the phrases "the kingdom of heaven" (which should be literally translated as "the kingdom of the heavens") and "the kingdom of God." We need to define these specific phrases as they are used by the New Testament writers, starting with the Gospel books and Jesus' message during His first advent (a message that began with John the Baptist, and was further preached by the apostles after Jesus' death and resurrection). The message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven/kingdom of God is at hand," also called elsewhere "the gospel (literally "good news") of the kingdom."

Our purpose here is not to go into a lengthy study, but rather a simple starter to define said "kingdom" and show that Scripture presents this kingdom as a *literal* kingdom (not a *figurative* one), and states clearly that it is not now, but **yet future**. (For an in-depth study of this topic, see "The Word of the Kingdom" Bible study on the Bible Studies page.)

First and foremost, "the kingdom of the heavens" and the "kingdom of God" does not in any way have **anything** to do with an "unsaved" person's *conversion* (their "initial salvation" if you will) in order to become a Christian. (For more information on that topic, see "10 Basic Questions for Christians" on our website.)

The Gospels books (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are all recordings of the same historic time period covering Jesus' earthly ministry, His death and His ressurrection; however, they each have slightly different structures and sometimes record different events—as well as varying details about the same events—depending on which elements they want the focus on. Therefore, many times we'll see 2, 3, or all 4 of the Gospel books tell the *same story* but with different details. *When we see this* it's important to compare them because **together** they'll give a fuller picture of the story they're telling. Here's an example in which Mark and Matthew are saying the exact same thing only using different iterations of phrasing:

> Mark 4:10-11
> But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. 11 And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables..."
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> Matthew 13:10-11
> And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

We can see in these two passages from two separate Gospel books *the same thing being said*, just different terminologies used. “The kingdom of [the] heaven[s]” and “the kingdom of God” are referencing the same thing.

The following verses from the same Gospel are another example where we can see the two terms being used synonymously: ONE kingdom in which entrance is difficult (for a rich man, in this case)—

> Matthew 19:23-24
> And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Jesus’ message was concerning **the good news** about a kingdom that was “at hand,” and repentance from His people was a necessary precursor to it’s establishment. His message was a *very real offer* of a kingdom, a kingdom in which entrance was the focal point. This “kingdom” (of heaven/of God, same thing being referenced) was the crux of Jesus’ ministry.

And Jesus Himself is the declared King of this kingdom—

> Matthew 2:2
> Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

> Luke 23:2-3
> And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." 3 Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered him and said, "It is as you say."

Jesus, the One born King of the Jews, came to His people with the offer of a kingdom, a kingdom in which their repentance was required in order to establish it. We know He was not received but was instead crucified, and even to His death He maintained He was King.

So then, what is this kingdom of heaven/God that Jesus was offering?

This needs some unpacking, so let’s first establish the purpose for the kingdom. In order to understand this, we must see man’s created purpose and his subsequent need for redemption in relation to this stated purpose. It will tie everything together.

Genesis 1:26-28
Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion [literally “rule”] over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion [literally “rule”] over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Psalm 8: 3-8
When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, 4 what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? 5 For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. 6 You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; you have put all things under his feet, 7 All sheep and oxen-even the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas. 9 O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!

1 Corinthians 15:22
For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Romans 5:18-19
Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

1 Thessalonians 5:23
Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved **blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Hebrews 2:5-10
For He has not put **the world to come** (Greek noun ‘oikoumene,’ meaning “the inhabited world”), of which we speak, in subjection to angels. 6 But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? 7 You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands. 8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet" [quote of Psalm 8:3-6]. For in that He [God] put all in subjection under him [man], He [God] left nothing that is not put under him [man]. But now we do not yet see all things put under him [man]. 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him [Jesus], for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in

bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Romans 8:16-19
The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, **if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together**. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

Man[kind] was created to rule, but we do not yet see man ruling over all things. Mankind is not currently ruling because sin entered in and man is now in need of redemption, a redemption (complete sanctification of all 3 parts, *spirit & soul & body*) that will be fully effected when Jesus returns. Man will one day rule in his redeemed state (redemption brought about solely by the work of God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit), with the Son of Man/the Son of God, thereby bringing forth God's intended purpose for him. The Kingdom is the stage in which Christ, with redeemed man as his joint heir, rules over the earth in order to reconcile all things (both in relation to the death, the curse on the earth, and the curse on man).

Note specifically Hebrews 2:5, "He did not subject to angels the inhabited world to come." Who did He subject the inhabited world to come to, if not angels? *Man*. And since man is a literal being, with a literal created purpose to rule, which will one day literally come true in the literal inhabited world to come, **this coming kingdom is literal also**.

Let's read more about the "kingdom"as it continued to be progressively revealed throughout the Old Testament, up unto Jesus' appearance with His message concerning it—

2 Samuel 7: 10-14a,16 [the prophet Nathan speaking the words of the Lord to David]
"Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, 11 since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.... 16 "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."

Notice the literalness of these prophetic statements. Paying attention to this in accordance with David's throne (which was a literal throne), you can see why Jesus is called "the son of David." This is also one of the places we find Jesus' right to be called "the Son of God."

Many people try to take the prophecies from the earlier verses and attribute them only to Solomon (especially in light of verse 14b which says “If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men.”). While that is certainly one application of the prophecy, you’ll notice that David understood it to be the *distant* future—

> 2 Samuel 7: 18-19
> Then King David went in and sat before the LORD; and he said: "Who am I, O Lord GOD? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? 19 And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord GOD; and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come [literally “afar off”].

Plus the New Testament quotes 2 Samuel 7:14-16 in Hebrews 1:5, directly connecting it to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ (as well as connecting it to Psalm 2:7, which connects it to Acts 13:33).

Additional prophecies surrounding Israel’s Promised King and His kingdom can be found in Isaiah—

> Isaiah 9:6-7
> For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Continuing with prophecies concerning a coming “son,” Isaiah makes a similar proclamation as Samuel about this One they were to be expecting. He states the literalness of David’s throne, and so we must take the rest of his statements as literal as well: a literal son born, with a literal government to rest on His shoulder (“rest on His shoulder” is a Hebrew idiom, just as in English, symbolizing acceptance of a burden or responsibility, which does not need to be taken literal), while He sits on David’s literal throne over a literal kingdom, upholding it with literal justice and righteousness.

Another place we read about this same Promised Son of David and His kingdom is in Luke—

> Luke 1:30-33
> And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.”

Notice the repetition here? A son born to receive a kingdom that will have no end, a kingdom that emanates from the throne of David, a son both of David and of the Most High. And here we have more information concerning the literalness of His entrance into the world (which was literally fulfilled).

There is no Scriptural evidence that allows one to take the literalness of some of the things mentioned in a list, but not the others.

This promised kingdom is also mentioned in the Book of Daniel with some detail, particularly that the Kingdom of Christ would come after a future war waged against the saints by an exceedingly dreadful beast (the Antichrist) who is the head of a kingdom which must be destroyed prior to the Coming Kingdom. The following passage from Daniel is cross-referenced with the Book of Revelation (text in blue) in order to see the fulfilment of said prophecies occurring in the Book of Revelation, a book almost exclusively about the end of this age and the future coming kingdom of Jesus Christ:

> Daniel 7: 13-14,18-27
> I (Daniel) kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. 14 And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.
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> 18 "But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all the ages to come." 19 Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast [from the vision told in Daniel 7:1-12], which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed, and trampled down the remainder with its feet, 20 and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head (Revelation 13:1 "And he stood on the sand of the seashore. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems [literally 'crowns'], and on his heads were blasphemous names."), and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts, and which was larger in appearance than its associates.
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> 21 I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them 22 until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. 23 Thus he ["one of those who were standing by"] said; "The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms, and it will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. 24 As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. 25 And he will speak out

against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time [three and a half years] (Revelation 13:5-7 "And there was given to him (the beast from Rev.13:1) a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months [three and a half years] was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.").

26 But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated, and destroyed forever. 27 Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him."

Simply put, this last kingdom in which the one like a Son of Man, the Ancient of Days, has dominion over will not ever be destroyed. Very similar to that which we already read in the other prophecies. *It is literal through and through*. **And still yet future**.

Another place to read about the timing of this literal Promised Kingdom of the Son of David, the Son of God, is again in Luke. I've done some cross-referencing here as well, in order to show the events in their proper timeline—

Luke 19:11-27
And while they were listening to these things, he went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. 12 He said therefore,

"A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. 13 And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.' 14 But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' (John 19:15, "They therefore cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.'")

15 And it came about that when he returned after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done (2 Cor. 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."). 16 And the first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' 17 And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in

authority over ten cities (Daniel 7:27b "Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One).' 18 And the second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' 19 And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.' 20 And another came, saying, 'Master, behold your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; 21 for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow.' 22 He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow? 23 Then why did you not put the money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?' 24 And he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas' (Galatians 6:7 "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap").

25 And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.' 26 'I tell you, that to everyone who has shall more be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 27 But these enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.'"

Jesus has gone away *to receive a kingdom*, and when He returns with His kingdom, He will judge His servants according to the work they've done while He was away. For those who've done well, their reward is a position of rulership. For those who have not done well, a negative recompense is due. *A literal future kingdom* to be shared with men found faithful at His return. ***In the Book of Revelation we can also see the transfer of the current kingdom of the world to the Lord Jesus, a kingdom currently being ruled over by Satan and his fallen angels—***

Revelation 11:15
"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

Compare with the following verses and commentary—

Luke 11:18a
"And if Satan also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?"

Luke 4:5-8
Then the devil, taking Him [Jesus] up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7 Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." 8 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

Satan has a kingdom. And notice that Jesus does not tell Satan that the kingdoms of the world are not his to give.

More descriptions of who's currently in ruling—

> 2 Corinthians 4:4
> …in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving…

> John 14:30
> "I [Jesus] will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me…"

Satan is the current ruler of this world system, the god of this world. He's currently ruling from the heavens over this earth (Eph. 6:12, Col. 1:16, 20), and Jesus' kingdom OF THE HEAVENS will be instituted only when Jesus returns and wrests it out from under Satan's control. And when this happens, the kingdom of heaven/God begins with Jesus and man ruling from the heavens. As told in Revelation (which is a record of future events)—

> Revelation 11:17
> [the twenty-four elders] saying, "We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast *begun to reign*."

> Revelation 12:10 (KJV)
> "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven (after Satan is cast out of heaven), 'Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for (literally "because") the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.'"

And recorded elsewhere as well—

> 2 Timothy 4:1 (KJV)
> I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom...

> Matthew 25:31-34
> "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, *then* He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

The kingdom of heaven comes at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One last place we'll look in order to make clear that this coming kingdom—the kingdom of heaven which Jesus was offering entrance into during His earthly ministry (a message the apostles continued after Jesus ascended)—is literal and is yet future is in the letter to the church at Corinth:

> I Corinthians 15:41-54
> There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.
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> 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.
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> 50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.
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> 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

It is almost impossible, especially in light of the above Scriptures, to place the kingdom of heaven *in which Jesus rules with man* in this present time, here and now, nor to see it figuratively.

The system of rulership currently in effect is the kingdom of Satan ruling over all the earth, from the heavens. The kingdom of heaven/kingdom of God which Jesus speaks about is the coming kingdom in which Jesus ousts Satan from his throne and takes His rightful place as King.

This coming kingdom of heaven—and entrance into it— is not only the topic of the parables, but it is the central topic of all Scripture.