

The Requirements of the Kingdom of God

- 1 Requirements of the kingdom are
Much stricter than the law's decrees;
No other requisite of God
Has ever higher been than these.
- 2 "Repent, the kingdom has come near":
This is the kingdom's first demand;
A change of mind we all must have
And on God's side must firmly stand.
- 3 That we the kingdom enter in,
Surpassing righteousness we need,
Exceeding that which is of law;
From life alone it must proceed.
- 4 That we the kingdom enter in,
We need to do the Father's will,
Not by our choice to work or act
But His one purpose to fulfill.
- 5 That we the kingdom enter in,
A simple child we must become—
Adjustable, obedient, meek—
And everything of self o'ercome.
- 6 The heav'nly kingdom e'en requires
That we as God should perfect be;
This standard we must fully meet,
That we may share its ecstasy.
- 7 The kingdom is the reign of God;
To match His nature is required.
'Tis only by the life of God
The kingdom's entry is acquired.
- 8 The kingdom is the rule of heav'n;
With heaven's state we must accord.
'Tis only by the life of heav'n
That we may share it with the Lord. (*Hymns*, #943)

The kingdom of God is an unknown entity to the majority of Christians today. It is, therefore, necessary, when we fellowship about the requirements of the kingdom, to first establish what the intrinsic significance of the kingdom is. Why did the Lord instruct us to pray for the coming of His kingdom and for the doing of His will on earth as it is done in heaven? Why do we need to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness? What is His way of heading up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth?

This is one of the excellent hymns written by Witness Lee that unveils God's marvelous New Testament economy. It presents the requirements of the kingdom of God upon its citizens—the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who submit to the heavenly rule for the establishing and carrying out of God's government on earth. By their submission to the Head, they become His fullness to rule and reign together with Him during the millennium and for eternity as His glorious Body and beloved bride (cf. Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25-27). The grace that enables them to rule and reign, however, should not be relegated only to the future; it should also be a present reality that is practiced and enjoyed in the church in the process of its growing up into the Head in all things and its mutual building up in and through all the members (cf. 4:15-16).

The Bible portrays an intense struggle between darkness and light—a warfare being waged between the kingdom of God and the usurping authority of darkness (cf. Col. 1:12-13; Eph. 6:12; Matt. 12:26). This aggressive confrontation is concentrated in the earthly sector of creation. In the heavenlies God rules absolutely; there is no resistance, no challenge, to His authority. The skies are clear, the light of God shines brightly, and there is joy and harmony in every aspect of the kingdom under God's governing presence. Our petition to the Father is that this same obedience with joy and harmony would be reproduced on the earth.

In the earthly sphere, however, God's kingdom is hidden, unseen, and unknown by many genuine Christians and avid students of the Bible. Earth, therefore, presents a stark contrast to the heavenly scene. Here the authority of darkness is prevailing. Paul instructs the believers in Ephesus concerning the believers' experience, saying, "Our wrestling is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies" (Eph. 6:12; cf. 2:1-3). *The heavenlies* indicates the earth's atmosphere, or the air, which is occupied by Satan and his legions. The earth, under the spell of the enemies of God, is full of multiple rebellions, endless opinions, subterfuge, intrigue, deceit, and all manner of opaqueness, darkness, and confusion attended by unhappiness, depression, and disharmony at every level of society. Today social media has heightened the power of

darkness to perpetrate all manner of resistance and organized rebellion with contempt, bitterness, and premeditated intent to harm, injure, and destroy.

The understanding of this rich hymn depends on both our knowledge of the Word of God and our experience of Christ in our daily living. The general theme of the hymn is the requirements for entrance into the kingdom. The central thought of this hymn derives from the Gospel of Matthew, which uses the term *the kingdom of the heavens* to denote a particular manifestation of the kingdom of God.

“Requirements of the Kingdom Are Much Stricter than the Law’s Decrees”

Stanza 1 speaks of the requirements of the kingdom being much stricter than the law’s decrees because the kingdom is the ruling and reigning arm of God. In fact, as the hymn affirms, no other requisite of God has ever exceeded the requirements of the kingdom. Most seeking Christians are very familiar with the teachings of the Lord Jesus that are recorded in Matthew 5 through 7, a section of the Bible often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. This segment of the Bible is related to the requirements of the kingdom. The Lord proclaimed that He came not to abolish the law but to fulfill the law; He not only fulfilled the law but also added the requirements of the kingdom to the law. He went on to say that every letter of the law would be fulfilled:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, Until heaven and earth pass away, one iota or one serif shall by no means pass away from the law until all come to pass. Therefore whoever annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of the heavens; but whoever practices and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of the heavens. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens. (5:17-20)

In a number of passages in Matthew 5 through 7, the Lord Jesus compared the requirements of the kingdom with the statutes of the law by using the contrasting phrases *you have heard that it was said* and *but I say to you*.

You have heard that it was said to the ancients, “You shall not murder, and whoever murders shall be liable to the judgment.” But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Raca, shall be liable to the judgment of the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, Moreh, shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire.” (5:21-22)

Although Christians may be very familiar with these teachings of the Lord Jesus, almost none seriously receive them as a matter of truth for their practice. On the contrary, the requirements of the kingdom in Matthew are often regarded by commentators as simply instructions to the Jews concerning the Messianic kingdom, the restored kingdom of David, which will be the earthly part of the millennium. The manifestation of the kingdom, with Christ in His heavenly rule, is completely ignored by this interpretation. Another belief of many is that the reward and punishment recorded in Matthew cannot refer to believers in Christ since the eternal salvation of a believer is a matter in faith, having nothing to do with reward. Of course, our eternal redemption and regeneration to be sons of God are altogether of grace, not of works. But in detailing the aspects of the kingdom, Matthew is full of references to reward and punishment (cf. the faithful and prudent slave and the evil slave in chapter 24, the prudent and foolish virgins in chapter 25, and the good and faithful and the evil and slothful slaves in chapter 25). The Lord Jesus warned that

everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them shall be likened to a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew, and they dashed against that house; and it fell, and its fall was great. (7:26-27)

We cannot lightly disregard the words of Paul concerning the running of the race, the receiving of the prize, the fighting of the good fight of the faith, the laying up of a crown of righteousness, and the judgment seat of Christ. When we touch the requirements of the kingdom, we are considering an extremely weighty matter: “No other requisite of God has ever higher been than these.”

“Repent, the Kingdom Has Come Near”

Stanza 2 speaks of the need to repent because the kingdom of God has drawn near. The drawing near of the kingdom indicates the coming of God with His authority. He is God! We have no choice but to yield and submit to Him. We must learn to firmly stand on God’s side. We must let Him take control of all that we think, do, and say. We must allow Him full access into every part of our heart and learn simply to obey His every inward demand.

The New Testament gospel was initiated with a call to repentance (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:15). In practicality, the kingdom’s drawing near was the coming of the Lord Jesus. When He came, the government of God came in Him and with Him. He was the kingdom drawing near. To the Pharisees, the coming of the kingdom involved the Messianic restoration of the kingdom of David as a physical realm in which the Messiah would rule and reign in

Israel. Such an understanding is not altogether wrong, but it is incomplete. When the Pharisees questioned the Lord Jesus about the coming of the kingdom, He indicated that the kingdom is an unseen spiritual realm in which God rules inwardly rather than outwardly: “The kingdom of God does not come with observation...For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:20-21). At that very moment the kingdom was in their midst. Because the Lord Jesus was completely and continually under God’s authority, God’s ruling realm was embodied in Him. As a man, He was the kingdom standing in their midst.

To repent is to have a change of mind, to turn away from the past way of thinking and acting, that is, to turn away from a life independent of God to a life in full submission to Him. The turn that we must make is not a matter of turning from a wrong way of living to a right way or from doing evil to doing good. Our lack is not right versus wrong; our lack is a living with no experiential regard for God. We do what we want, what we feel is proper, and what brings us pleasure. Our mind, emotion, and will have been thoroughly and fully turned away from God. Even if we try to do the right thing, our energizing source is not God. We may be very “spiritual,” but the question remains: “Who is the one on the throne in our heart? Who is the decision maker?” We may find it easy to do things for God, but very difficult, even impossible, to obey God as the ruling Master within our heart. We must repent; we must have a deep turn in our mind, emotion, and will from darkness to light, from the self to God, and from our independence of heart and mind to a purity of faith and obedience.

“Surpassing Righteousness We Need... From Life Alone It Must Proceed”

Stanza 3 refers to Matthew 5:20, which says, “I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens.” Christ has become righteousness to us through faith in His redemptive death on the cross (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30), and we have been made the righteousness of God in Him (5:21). This is the objective righteousness, which has been bestowed on us through faith. Based on the context of Matthew 5 through 7, the surpassing righteousness spoken of in 5:20 is a subjective righteousness, a lived-out righteousness.

In Matthew the Lord Jesus spoke a parable concerning a wedding feast prepared by a king for his son, which many of those who were invited refused to attend. Then the king sent his slaves to the crossroads in order to compel others to come so that the tables of the feast would be filled. Among those attending the feast was one who was not clothed with a wedding garment. The king said to

him, “Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?” (22:12). The man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, “Bind his feet and hands, and cast him out into the outer darkness. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. For many are called but few are chosen” (vv. 13-14).

When we compare this account with the account of the wedding feast of the Lamb in Revelation 19, we see that the wedding garment is the righteousnesses of the saints: “His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints” (vv. 7-8). *Righteousnesses* here refers not to the objective righteousness that was bestowed by God upon the believers at the time of their regeneration but to the subjective living of the believers. We received the life of God when we believed into the Lord Jesus as our Savior (cf. John 1:12-13), and we have the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Now we must learn to reject our natural life and live by the life and nature of God within us.

We have been born of God! We have been transferred out of the authority of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love! The issue should be a living of this life in righteousness—“From life alone it must proceed.” Paul warns the believers in Ephesus to no longer walk as the Gentiles walk in the vanity of the mind, being darkened in their understanding and being alienated from the life of God because of the hardness of their heart. As believers, we need such a warning because it is very easy for us, in spite of having genuinely received the life of God through faith, to still be loose in our daily living, ignoring both the conscience within and the Word of God without. Of course, we can never earn our eternal salvation, but in our daily living we need to be saved from the old man and our old manner of living. For this reason we must learn Christ as the reality is in Jesus. Through learning Him, we put off the old man, we are renewed daily in the spirit of our mind, and we put on the new man with the new manner of life. This new man, which is Christ lived out through us subjectively, has been “created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality” (cf. Eph. 4:17-24).

“We Need to Do the Father’s Will”

Stanza 4 focuses on the Father’s will: “That we the kingdom enter in, / We need to do the Father’s will, / Not by our choice to work or act / But His one purpose to fulfill.” Doing the will of the Father is another great requirement. The Lord Jesus clearly stated that the entrance into the kingdom is restricted to those who do the will of His Father in the heavens:

Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into

the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power? And then I will declare to them: I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness. (Matt. 7:21-23)

Many commentaries of the Bible expound this portion of the Word by equating the workers of lawlessness with false, or unsaved, workers. However, the issue here is not one of not believing in the Lord—these workers called on His name, worked in His name, and cast out demons in His name—the problem is that of not being according to the will of the Father. The central purpose of the Father is the dispensing of His life for the building up of the Body of Christ to have His house for His expression and good pleasure. The workers here were very busy doing their own will in the name of the Lord Jesus. When the Lord spoke of departing from Him, He was not referring to eternal perdition; His allusion to entering into the kingdom was not about “going to heaven.” If we read Matthew 7 carefully, we will realize that the Lord was speaking of two things that are the basis for our entrance into the kingdom of the heavens:

To enter into the kingdom of the heavens, we need to do two things: call on the Lord and do the will of the heavenly Father. To call on the Lord suffices for us to be saved (Rom. 10:13), but to enter into the kingdom of the heavens, we also need to do the will of the heavenly Father. Hence, not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord,” will enter into the kingdom of the heavens; but those who call on the Lord and do the will of the heavenly Father will enter in. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 21, note 1)

The Lord declared, “I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness” (v. 23). The phrase *I never knew you* indicates that the Lord never approved of their doings; their works were lawless, that is, not according to the will of the Father. The hymn wisely declares, “Not by our choice to work or act.” Too many times we assume that we know what to do and how to act, without giving even a glance toward our Lord within. Thus, we have no sense of the Father’s will.

Many Christian workers live and act for and in themselves, having no feeling for the fellow members in the Body. They often live in competition with other members of the Body, having no feelings of kindness, compassion, love, or forgiveness (cf. Col. 3:12-14). Such a cold and isolated living and work will surely result in the Lord saying, “I never knew you.”

The Father’s will is directly related to His kingdom coming to the earth. His desire is to head up all things in

Christ. For this great purpose, He is working to perfect a group of people on this earth unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3-5, 9-10; 4:12-13, 15-16). They will become His corporate expression not only as the Body of Christ but also as the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). This kind of service is right and proper in the eyes of the Father.

According to Matthew 7:21, doing many things for God, such as prophesying, casting out demons, and works of power in the name of the Lord, is not necessarily indicative of doing the Father’s will; such doings do not necessarily build up the Body of Christ. Paul warns the believers in Corinth: “According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it” (1 Cor. 3:10). We need to build according to the inner ruling and guiding of the Father instead of doing many good and proper things according to our own purpose and understanding, without regard for the inner sense of our Father.

“A Simple Child We Must Become”

Stanza 5 refers to the Lord’s response to the disciples who were contending over who was the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 18:1-4). In the midst of their contention, the Lord Jesus called a little child to Him and cautioned the disciples that unless one turns and becomes like a little child, he shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens. The one who humbles himself like a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens. Stanza 5 applies this principle: “That we the kingdom enter in, / A simple child we must become— / Adjustable, obedient, meek— / And everything of self o’ercome.” The requirements of the kingdom challenge the believers at every step in their daily life. To be simple as a little child—adjustable, obedient, and meek, overcoming everything of the self—is like trying to scale the highest mountain. Who can live such a life? Only the Lord Jesus uniquely fulfilled all these conditions for entrance into the kingdom. The requirement to be simple like a child cannot be fulfilled by our own resolutions.

“That We as God Should Perfect Be”

Stanza 6 further charges, “The heav’nly kingdom e’en requires / That we as God should perfect be; / This standard we must fully meet, / That we may share its ecstasy.” A discerning and honest person would surely realize his or her utter impotence to meet these requisites. How can anyone fulfill such obligations? It is impossible! In Matthew 19:16-26 there is an incident that helps us understand how we can enter into the kingdom that demands

such high standards. A rich young man came to the Lord and asked Him what he must do to have eternal life. The Lord first told him that he should keep the commandments of the law, such as not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, not bearing false witness, honoring your father and mother, and loving your neighbor as yourself. The young man said that he had kept all these, at which point the Lord advised him that if he would be perfect, he should go, sell his possessions, and give to the poor, which would cause him to have treasure in the heavens, and then come and follow Him. When the young man went away sorrowing because he was very wealthy, the Lord lamented that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. The disciples were astonished and questioned Him, “Who then can be saved?” (v. 25). The Lord’s reply was simple: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (v. 26). We must look away from ourselves, with whom such things are impossible, to our God, with whom all things are possible.

“’Tis Only by the Life of God the Kingdom’s Entry is Acquired”

“The kingdom is the reign of God; / To match His nature is required. / ’Tis only by the life of God / The kingdom’s entry is acquired.” It is only by the life of God that we can enter this high and lofty realm. Witness Lee testifies to this great truth:

The requirements of the kingdom can never be met by man, and God never expected man to meet them. The demands He makes, He Himself meets—and that is the grace revealed in the New Testament...Today the requirements of the kingdom serve to demonstrate the infinite ability of God. He has become our life that in us He may meet all the demands His kingdom makes upon us. (“Kingdom” 258)

It is God Himself as the life and flow within us who alone can meet the demand. The kingdom is a realm in which God moves and acts in all things; to enter such a realm, we must be born of God, receive the life of God, and become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. The governing of God can never be reduced to a teaching or regulation; it is the inward reality of the Spirit of Jesus Christ as our life that alone can carry out this kind of living (Col. 3:4). Through the new birth, we have received the life of God. The innate ability of this life is able to meet all the requirements, but we must learn to live by this life.

In the midst of the realm of darkness, Christ came to express and represent God. When He was on the earth, Christ was the kingdom of God because God’s life was within Him, guiding, governing, and empowering Him.

The governing of God is not merely an outward matter; the inner ability of God’s life is the ruling and working of the kingdom. Today, through regeneration this life has been imparted into the believers through Christ as a seed that must be developed by growing. The growth of the divine life within a believer overcomes the self and the flesh, both of which love to be displayed in the world. We must have the eyes of our heart enlightened to see and know the hope of God’s calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe (cf. Eph. 1:18-19). These divine actions have the power to change our disposition and develop the divine life within us, the life by which we can overcome the enemy and magnify Christ in our mortal bodies (cf. Phil. 1:20).

God comes to us in Christ, and the Lord Jesus is the embodiment of the divine life. When we receive Him, He comes into us as the divine life, bearing with Him the divine love. The divine life of Christ is the resurrection life that upholds and sustains the divine authority of the kingdom. As we enjoy Him, we are infused with this life and saturated with the divine authority, which both restricts and governs us. Because this divine life with its authority is permeated with the divine love, we are ruled and restricted in the sweetness of love. In this way, as we are being filled with the divine life, love, and obedience, we are being fully delivered from the self and flesh, which are constituted with the authority of darkness. The more we love Him and grow in His life, the more we are transferred out of the authority of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love (cf. Col. 1:12-13).

“With Heaven’s State We Must Accord”

Stanza 8 says, “The kingdom is the rule of heav’n; / With heaven’s state we must accord. / ’Tis only by the life of heav’n / That we may share it with the Lord.” God’s kingdom is the realm where God rules absolutely, supremely, and without insistence, resistance, force, or effort. Hence, *heaven’s state* indicates a spontaneous and absolute agreement with and submission to the heavenly rule, the supreme will of God. In order to be a part of the kingdom of God, we must be in absolute submission to the will of God by living according to the life of God within. This kind of absolute submission is not possible for the natural man; we must be born of God. After we receive the divine birth, we must live by growing up into the divine life in all things. We must learn to live, walk, and have our being in the divine life. This divine life is in the Son. When we experience and enjoy Him, we are in the kingdom of God, and we with the Son are the kingdom of God in reality.

God the Father has transferred us through regeneration into the kingdom of the Son of His love—a very delightful

place in which the Son is all and in all. When we allow this Christ to occupy every part of our life and living, we are in the delightful realm of His kingdom and in the bright shining of His presence. Here self is gone, and the flesh is over. God is all and in all, and the requirements of the kingdom are fully met in us (cf. Rom. 8:4).

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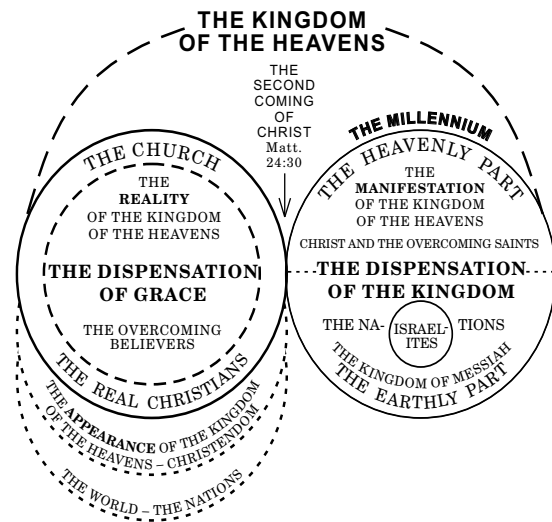
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Footnote and Chart from the *Recovery Version of the Bible*

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens” (Matt. 5:3).

kingdom: *Kingdom of the heavens* is a term used exclusively by Matthew, indicating that the kingdom of the heavens differs from the kingdom of God, ...the latter being mentioned in the other three Gospels. The kingdom of God is God’s general reign from eternity past to eternity future. It comprises eternity without beginning before the foundation of the world, the chosen patriarchs (including the paradise of Adam), the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, the church in the New Testament, the coming millennial kingdom (including its heavenly part, the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, and its earthly part, the Messianic kingdom), and the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem in eternity without end. The kingdom of the heavens is a specific section within the kingdom of God, a section composed only of the church today and the heavenly part of the coming millennial kingdom. Hence, in the New Testament, especially in the other three Gospels, the kingdom of the heavens, a section of the kingdom of God, is also called the “kingdom of God.” In the Old Testament the kingdom of God, generally, already existed with the nation of Israel ([Matt.] 21:43); the kingdom of the heavens, specifically, had still not come, and it only drew near when John the Baptist came (3:1-2; 11:11-12)...

If we are poor in spirit, the kingdom of the heavens is ours: we are in its reality now in the church age, and we will share in its manifestation in the kingdom age.



<p>THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS IS NEAR</p> <p>Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7</p>	<p>THE MILLENNIUM Rev. 20:4-6</p> <p>(1) THE HEAVENLY PART The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens Matt. 24:46-47; 25:19-23; Luke 19:15-19; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 2 Tim. 2:12</p> <p>“The kingdom of the Father” Matt. 13:43 with Christ and the overcoming saints as the kings</p>
<p>THE BEGINNING OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS</p> <p>Matt. 16:18-19; 13:24; 22:2</p>	<p>(2) THE EARTHLY PART The kingdom of Messiah 2 Sam. 7:13</p> <p>“The tabernacle of David” Acts 15:16 The restored kingdom of Israel Acts 1:6</p>
<p>THE CHURCH</p> <p>1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 1:22b-23</p>	<p>“The kingdom of the Son of Man” Matt. 13:41; Rev. 11:15 with: (a) the saved Israelites Rom. 11:26-27; Zech. 12:10; Ezek. 36:25-28 as the priests Zech. 8:20-23; Isa. 2:2-3 and (b) the restored nations Acts 3:21 as the people Matt. 25:32-34</p>
<p>THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS</p> <p>Matt. 5-7</p>	
<p>THE APPEARANCE OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS</p> <p>Matt. 13:24-42</p>	