

## The Advancing Kingdom

The article on Matthew 13:24-30 is edited from the Ligonier Ministries

One primary reason why non-believing Jews do not recognize Jesus as Messiah is that in His first coming He did not set the people of God over the earth and remove the presence of evil, as was expected by the Jews of His day. They argue that since suffering and death remain, Jesus cannot be the Messiah. The horrors they witnessed under Roman rule would not occur under the Messiah's reign.

Jesus' earliest disciples shared these assumptions and were troubled by the seemingly unchanged situation with His advent. In Matthew 13:24-30, we read of the history of Christ's kingdom in the parable of the wheat and the weeds. In this parable, we should pay particular attention to the growth period between seedtime and harvest. God's kingdom, Jesus teaches, does not come all at once. It is inaugurated in His first advent, continues to grow after His exaltation, and is consummated when He returns to judge the entire creation. Jesus' primary point is the coexistence of kingdom people with the world's people in this age. Though the context also suggests some application to the church (Mt 13:19-23, 47-50), the point here is not that we should abandon efforts to keep the church pure (18:7-14, 21-35). The point is that the kingdom remains obscure in the present world and only the final day will bring God's true children into their vindicated glory and banish the wicked from among them (Ladd 1974b:97). Along with the work of Jesus comes an increase in the Devil's activity, which is why the kingdom's arrival brings strife for the Lord's servants (Revelation 6:1-8).

Caution must be said that a selective reading of Scripture prompts many Jews to reject Jesus. When verses of the Bible are read in isolation, certain passages in the prophets teach that the Messiah brings the kingdom fully and immediately. For example, the "day of the Lord" texts apparently teach that God's salvation and judgment occur on a single day ([Ezek. 30:1-3](#); [Zech. 14:1-9](#)). However, the inauguration, continuation, and consummation pattern of Christ's kingdom is not without precedent in Scripture if we read the "day of the Lord" passages alongside other biblical texts. Abraham owned only a portion of Palestine before his death (Gen. 23); his children waited centuries to possess the land. David was anointed as king (1 Sam. 16) years before the nation of Israel came under his control (1 Sam. 17-2 Sam. 7). Even the old covenant saints lived with the reality of kingdom inauguration, continuation, and consummation.

Our Savior's apostles would later see that the day of the Lord, otherwise called the "last days," refers to this time of kingdom expansion ([Acts 2:14-41](#)). Though consummated at the final judgment, the day of the Lord is longer than twenty-four hours. It covers the entire period between Christ's two advents. Presently, there is much fervor over the "last days," and many people declare that we are living in the last days for the first time in world history. However, while the return of Christ is most certainly closer to us today than it was yesterday, it still may yet be many years off. We have been living in the last days since Jesus rose from the dead, and we should be conducting our lives in the fear of God accordingly ([2 Peter 3:11-13](#)).