



# Understanding The Kingdom of God

[beginningCatholic.com](http://beginningCatholic.com)

**Understanding The Kingdom Of God  
by  
Fr. Leopold Fonck, S.J.**

Edited by  
Michael Stapp  
[www.beginningCatholic.com](http://www.beginningCatholic.com)

Copyright © 2006, beginningCatholic.com

Selected and re-published from:

*The Parables of the Gospel*

by Leopold Fonck, S.J.

President and Lecturer of the Biblical Institute

Consultor of the Biblical Commission in Rome

Previously published in 1915

by Frederick Pustet & Co., New York & Cincinnati

IMPRIMI POTES: A.J. Maas, S.J.  
Praep. Prov.

NIHIL OBSTAT: Remigius Lafort, D.D.  
Censor

IMPRIMATUR: ✠ John Cardinal Farley  
Archbishop of New York  
New York, Nov. 17, 1914

## Editor's Introduction

Proclaiming the kingdom of God was the starting point and the center of Jesus' whole public life. He tells us plainly in the Gospels that he was sent to announce this kingdom, to induce men by means of his miracles to believe in his gospel, and to unite all the Faithful in this new kingdom.

From this, it is plain to see that every Christian must gain a solid understanding of this concept of the "kingdom of God."

That is the purpose of this book.

The content of this eBook is an abridged form of two introductory chapters of Father Fonck's monumental work, *The Parables of the Gospel*. As Fr. George O'Neill says in his Preface to the English translation of that book, Fr. Fonck "occupies a supremely important position as a teacher of Holy Scripture." Fr. Leopold Fonck was a distinguished Catholic Biblical scholar at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Pope Pius X appointed him as the first President and member of his Pontifical Biblical Institute, and also named Fr. Fonck as a consultor of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Both institutions were chartered to provide outstanding and faithful Biblical scholarship in service to the Popes. Fr. Fonck also contributed to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* numerous articles on Scripture.

This eBook provides Fr. Fonck's timeless description of the basic idea of the kingdom of God. Since Jesus spoke of the kingdom unceasingly, this knowledge is essential if we are to understand both Christ and his Gospel.

I have made minimal changes to Fr. Fonck's original text, although this work is somewhat shorter than the original chapters in his book. I have removed some quotations in Greek and Latin that were secondary to the main text. In a few places where these passages were necessary for understanding the main text, I have replaced them with English translations. I have also abridged a small amount of material to make it more readable to non-scholars, and have updated Scriptural references to use modern names of the Biblical books and the current notation for Biblical citations. But none of these changes reduce or alter Fr. Fonck's core text, and my hope is that I've made it more accessible to all.

This clear body of teaching from Fr. Fonck is an important contribution to our own understanding of Scripture, Our Lord, and our faith. My hope is that this small eBook will help your own faith grow, and thereby lead you to even closer union with Our Lord.

Michael Stapp  
beginningCatholic.com

# Table of Contents

Editor's Introduction.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Chapter 1: The Jewish Teaching in the Time of Our Lord Concerning the Kingdom of God.....	5
The Kingdom in the Old Testament.....	5
The Kingdom in the Apocryphal Jewish Writings.....	9
The Kingdom in Other Jewish & Historical Sources.....	10
New Testament Evidence of Jewish Expectation of the Messiah.....	11
The Characteristics of the Kingdom.....	12
Chapter 2: The Doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven in the Parables.....	16
The Kingdom: Center of Christ's Life and Preaching.....	16
The Parables: Keys to the Kingdom of God.....	17
Three Main Aspects of the Kingdom of God.....	20
Groups of Parables According to Three Aspects of the Kingdom.....	21

## **Chapter 1: Ancient Jewish Teaching About the Kingdom of God**

### ***The Kingdom in the Old Testament***

The kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Heaven, formed the real center-point of our Lord's teaching in general, but most especially in his parables.

The purpose of these chapters is to provide a short inquiry into that central and indispensable truth.

For this first chapter we shall consider the Jewish ideas regarding the kingdom of God. They afford us a suitable background for the admirable picture which our Lord's words concerning the kingdom of Heaven delineate for us.

The Old Testament, the Judaic apocrypha (non-Biblical religious writings) and other writings of the time immediately before or after the birth of Christ, and lastly the allusions which we meet with occasionally in the New Testament show us what was the belief in Israel at the time of our Lord concerning the kingdom of God.

The Old Testament was the primary source from which the Israelite believers derived their ideas. It is true that we seek vainly in it for the term "kingdom of heaven," and "kingdom of God" occurs only once in the Book of Wisdom, where it is recorded of the fugitive Jacob that wisdom showed him the "kingdom of God" (Wis 10:10). It also occurs once in Tobit (13:1). However, we may refer for the latter term to the passages in which the kingdom or the dominion of Yahweh is mentioned: 1 Chron 28:5; 2 Chron 13:8. Cf. Ps 22:29; 45:6; 103:19; 145:11-13.

But, if we keep in view the idea which underlies this term, we shall find it in all parts of the Old Testament. Yahweh, our

God, is eternal King and Lord for ever and ever: we meet with such words continually both in the Psalms and in the exhortations and the predictions of the Prophets (Ex 15:18; Ps 10:16; 47: 8; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1; 146:10; Ez 20:33; Dan 4:31-34). This dominion of God extends over all, for he is “the God of all the kingdoms of the earth, and has made heaven and earth” (Is 37:16). According to this conception the whole world is God’s kingdom.

But his chosen people are, in an especial manner, the kingdom of this God. After the Lord had made a special covenant with Abraham for himself and his descendants, he caused it to be declared to the children of Israel who dwelt in Egypt: “And I will take you to myself for my people, I will be your God and you shall be my people” (Ex 6:7). And again, after the covenant, he repeatedly reminds his people of their special position: “I will be your God and you shall be my people” (Lev 26:12). “The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be his peculiar people of all the peoples that are upon the earth” (Deut 7:6; cf. 32:9, etc.). The Lord, indeed, regarded Israel as his own especial kingdom. He gave to it the Commandments and the regulations by which its moral and religious life should be ruled. But he did still more. The whole constitution and all the laws of social and political life were due to him, the Almighty God who, through his representative on earth, exercised his royal prerogatives over his people. Rebellion against his ministers was indeed high treason against his royal authority, as we learn from his words to Samuel: “For they have not rejected thee, but me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam 8:7).

The ideal of a kingdom of God to which Yahweh wished to attain in this theocracy of the old covenant was never realized owing to the obstinacy and wickedness of Israel. But the Lord from the days of the Patriarchs had destined another kingdom for his people, of which this first should be but as a faint shadow.

The Redeemer, already promised to our first parents in paradise, who would redeem us from sin and all its burden, had been continually and more and more definitely announced to them. And his kingly rank and the kingdom which should include all nations over which this Messiah should rule were likewise more and more clearly made known. Balaam beheld from afar how a star should rise out of Jacob, and a scepter spring up from Israel (Num 24:17-19), and how a ruler should come forth from Jacob (2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 89; Is 9:6 f.; 11:1; Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:23; Hos 3:5). This ruler in Israel, being a descendant of David, would be born in Bethlehem and yet "his going forth is from the beginning, from the day of eternity" (Mich 5:2).

In the same manner the divinity of this Prince was clearly pointed out and his kingdom plainly described as the kingdom of God. It is precisely of this kingdom of the Messiah or of God that we find it so often said by the Prophets: "The Lord shall reign and be king in Sion" (Is 24:23; 52:7; Mic 4:7; Zeph 3:15. Cf. Is 2:2-4; Jer 30-33; Mic 4:1 seq.; Zech 9:9; Mal 3:1).

Although Sion appears as the center and the starting point of this kingdom, later it shall embrace all nations. From east to west and from north to south, the whole earth shall be included within its boundaries. Besides this universality, which all the prophecies emphasize as the distinguishing characteristic of the future kingdom of God, the Prophets also point out the spiritual nature of this kingdom. When they are in need of thought-inspiring images with which to describe its riches and its joys, they, before all, set forth clearly that the coming ruler will convert all nations to the true God, and will lead them to the fear of God and of his justice (Is 2:2; 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Mic 4:2, etc.).

The Prophets repeatedly and emphatically declared that this kingdom of the Messiah should take the place of the ancient theocracy. We find this already foreshown in Jacob's words when he blessed Juda, that the scepter should be taken from Juda at the coming of him for whom it was intended and who

was expected by the nations (Gen 49:10). Ezekiel emphatically points this out later, first in the parable of the Cedar and the Vine Shoot (Ezek 17:22-24), and then again more plainly in his denunciation of Jerusalem (Ezek 21:25-27). Malachi, the last of the Prophets, especially announced the rejection of the ancient sacrifices and the offering of a clean oblation in the new kingdom of God (Mal 1:10 et seq.).

Daniel, the last of the greater Prophets, spoke with most particular clearness and solemnity of the coming Ruler and his kingdom. After he had explained the four great kingdoms to the king of Babylon, he added: "But in the day of those kingdoms the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and his kingdom shall not be delivered up to another people, and it shall break in pieces and shall consume all those kingdoms and itself shall stand for ever: according as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and broke in pieces the clay, and the iron, and the brass, and the silver, and the gold" (Dan 2:44 et seq.).

Later, he returns to the subject of the four kingdoms and describes still more clearly the personality of the Ruler in the new kingdom of the Messiah, the kingdom of God: "I beheld therefore in the vision of the night, and lo, one like a son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and he came even to the Ancient of days: and they presented him before him. And there was given to him power, and glory, and a kingdom: and all peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve him: his power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away: and his kingdom shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7:13).

Finally, he announces the time of the coming of this "anointed one who is the ruler," who shall come "that transgression may be finished, and sin may have an end, and iniquity may be abolished, and ever-lasting justice may be brought, and vision and prophecy may be fulfilled, and the holy of holies may be anointed" (Dan 9:24). While the holy city and the sanctuary of the ancient covenant shall be forever laid waste, and the

ancient sacrifices and oblations shall be abolished forever, this new *sanctum sanctorum*, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the new covenant, with its spiritual riches shall take the place of the ancient one to all eternity (Dan 9:24-27).

Thus the idea of a heavenly kingdom to be established on earth by the Messiah could not be new or strange to the Israelite who was familiar with the writings of the Patriarchs and the Prophets. And that in reality it was familiar we know from the numerous Jewish apocrypha of the time immediately before or after the birth of Christ.

### ***The Kingdom in the Apocryphal<sup>1</sup> Jewish Writings***

The so-called third Book of the Sibylline Oracles, the greater part of which probably belongs to the year 140 B.C., must be regarded as one of the oldest of these remarkable documents. Amongst other things we find in it the following: "When Rome shall rule even over Egypt for a set purpose so arranged (?), then will the greatest kingdom of the immortal king of men appear. Then will come the holy Lord who will wield the scepter over the whole earth, to all eternity; unto this is time hastening" (Sibyll. 8, v. 46-50.). The same is repeated further on: "For God will send thither a king from the sunrise who will put an end to wicked wars all over the earth " (idem, v. 652 *et seq.*), "and then he will establish his reign for all time over all men" (v. 766 *et seq.*).

In the so-called "figurative discourses" of the apocryphal Book of Enoch, which probably belongs to the years 104-78 B.C., we find described, quite in harmony with Daniel, the future kingdom and its sovereign the Son of Man or Man's Son, the anointed of the Lord who sits beside the "source of

---

1 The term "apocryphal" refers to religious writings that were written around the time of other Biblical books, but which are not part of the Bible because they are not considered to be inspired by God. The apocryphal books of the Old and New Testament are somehow defective in terms of their content and doctrine. However, they can be useful to scholars for studying historical concerns, which is precisely how Fr. Fonck uses them here.

light” on the throne of his royalty and rules his heavenly kingdom.

The apocryphal “Psalms of Solomon” belong to a not much later date, probably to the last century before Christ. In these canticles there is also repeated mention of the great and just king who judges the world and of the coming Messiah and his kingdom, which is described in the two last psalms. They give expression in a touching manner to the longing for the coming of this kingdom and of its just and sinless sovereign who “is the anointed of the Lord”.

The apocryphal “Ascension of Moses” into Heaven was probably written soon after the death of the first Herod. In it there is also mention of the time when “his sovereignty over all his creatures will appear,” that is to say, when “the divine Power shall rise from his throne and go forth from his holy habitation”.

### ***The Kingdom in Other Jewish & Historical Sources***

In the Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament, which came into general use from the time of the captivity and which very often complete the ancient rendering of a Scripture text, we learn from numerous passages how very familiar the Jews were with the idea of God’s sovereignty and of the kingdom of the Messiah.

We find also in one passage in Midrash the term *divine sovereignty*, that is, God’s sovereignty, which was destined to take the place of the “godless sovereignty” of the Romans.

In the same way we shall just refer to the Jewish ritual prayers, the greater number of which are very old and which include sentiments very much older. The ardent desire for the Messiah and for the kingdom of mercy and grace which shall be made manifest through him finds touching expression in these prayers and through them was kept continually in the hearts of the congregation of the synagogue.

We also see in the ancient histories of Philo and Josephus (Jewish historians who lived around the time of Christ) how lively was the expectation of the Messiah and his kingdom amongst the Jews at the time of our Lord.

### ***New Testament Evidence of Jewish Expectation of the Messiah***

We also find this expectation confirmed in many passages of the New Testament. The magnificent hymns of thanksgiving of Zachariah and Simeon express aloud the views of devout persons in Israel who waited patiently for the deliverance of their nation. The coming Messiah was raised up by the Lord God of Israel as “a horn of salvation” in the house of David his servant, as “salvation from all enemies, and all that hate us,” so that all might serve him in holiness and justice in the way of peace (Lk 1:68-79). The Lord had prepared this salvation as a light to the enlightenment of the Gentiles and the glory of his people of Israel (Lk 2:29-32). The aged prophetess Anna also spoke of the child Jesus in the temple to all that looked for the redemption of Israel (Lk 2:28).

But this “day-spring from on high,” who visits his people in the deepest mercy of God, is expected to come as a mighty king in Israel. The wise men from the East, when they inquired for the newborn king of the Jews, were directed by the unanimous voice of the high priests and the scribes of the Jewish nation to Bethlehem (Mt 2:2 *et seq.*).

When Christ at his first meeting with Nathaniel permitted a ray of his almighty wisdom to enlighten him, the latter, quite overwhelmed, exclaimed: “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the king of Israel” (Jn 1:49). After our Lord had so wonderfully revealed his divine power in the multiplication of the loaves, the people wanted to make him a king by force (Jn 6:15). The disciples strove with one another as to which should be the greatest in the “kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 18:1), and the sons of Zebedee sought through their mother’s

intercession to secure for themselves the place of honor on the right and on the left of their sovereign's throne (Mt 20:20 *et seq.*). At our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the jubilant inhabitants met him with cries of Hosanna: "Blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord—the king of Israel" (Lk 19:38; Jn 12:13. Cf. Mk. 11:10).

Even the history of the Passion shows how deeply rooted in all was this conviction of the royalty of the kingdom of the Messiah. Pilate's question, the soldiers' mockery, the petition of the thief, the blasphemies against the Crucified Victim — all imply this conviction (Mt 27:11, 29:42; Lk 23:42). And from the wood of ignominy the title attached to the Cross proclaimed to all, loudly and solemnly, the royal rank of the Messiah.

The kingdom of this monarch was called by the Israelites "the kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 18:1) and the "kingdom of God" (Lk 14:15; 17:20; cf. Mk 15:43) or sometimes merely "the kingdom " (Acts 1:6).

### ***The Characteristics of the Kingdom***

If we desire to examine more closely the nature and the characteristics ascribed to that "kingdom of God" of which the people had such a deep conviction in the time of our Lord, we shall find that, on one side, it was regarded and expected as a divine, everlasting, universal, spiritual kingdom. In the Old Testament as well as in the apocryphal writings the three first characteristics are brought into special prominence. The kingdom must come from Heaven, from God; it must be founded and guided by God himself; it must last for ever, no other kingdom must ever take its place (cf. also Jn 12:34), and it must include all the nations of the earth.

But the spiritual nature of the kingdom and of its riches are also repeatedly insisted on, not only in numerous passages of the Old Testament, but also in the apocryphal writings already mentioned. The kingdom itself is called "the assembly

of the just" (the apocryphal book of Enoch) and penance is described as a condition of entrance into it. No injustice will be committed under the King's sovereignty, who is just himself and free from sin (Psalms of Solomon). Therefore the assembly implore of God: "O God, purify Israel on the day of healing grace, when its anointed of the Lord shall come," and "a good generation shall live in the fear of God and in works of justice" (Psalms of Solomon).

But these characteristics, and above all the spirituality of the coming kingdom, became more and more transformed according to the carnal ideas of a people who were sunk in earthly things. Its heavenly origin and its eternal duration gave occasion for confounding the kingdom of the Messiah to be established on earth with the circumstances of the consummation at the end of the ages, and for transferring the Prophets' descriptions of this glorious and perfect sovereignty of God when time had ended to the rule and the people of the Messiah. Further, all people should indeed belong to this kingdom, but, according to the Jewish idea, they should first become Israelites in all things and should take upon themselves the whole burden of the Law. And in the observance of this Law, supreme importance was more and more attached to the letter and to the external, ceremonial directions then prevailing.

The spiritual nature of the kingdom having thus lost its special significance, the Jewish writings in their descriptions of the sovereignty of the Messiah show how much the hopes and expectations of the people were founded on carnal and earthly things. The execution of vengeance on all enemies and oppressors and political freedom through the foundation of a great earthly kingdom were to be the sign of the beginning of this sovereignty. Then "shall the temple of the great God be filled to overflowing with splendid wealth, with gold and silver and purple decorations, and the earth shall produce its fruits, and the sea be full of riches" (the apocryphal Book of the Sibylline Oracles). It will fulfill the promises which the Lord gave to the devout in Israel (the observers of the Law) that he

would bestow “upon them the whole earth, and would open to them the gates and the world of the blest, and give them all joys and a glad heart and an immortal spirit. From all parts of the earth shall they bring frankincense and gifts to the house of the great God . . . and there shall be upon earth just riches”; and so on (Sibyll.).

In later writings this hope of earthly joys in the kingdom of the Messiah is still more strongly expressed. In the apocryphal Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, which dates from after the fall of Jerusalem, the “flashing lightnings” are thus explained: “And when he has brought the whole world into subjection and has seated himself in peace on the throne of his kingdom, then will he reveal himself in great joy, and tranquility will appear. And then will health descend in the dew, and sickness will disappear. And care and trouble, and groaning amongst men will pass away, joy will spread over the whole earth. Women will bring forth their children without pain,” etc.

The same tendency to look for external and earthly things is met with in the Rabbinical sayings and teachings even of the most remote time. They distinguish between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the Messiah. Whilst, with reference to the latter, the descriptions of the apocrypha are surpassed in sensual realism, by the former they understand God’s supremacy and its recognition on the part of mankind. The sovereignty of God is usually described by the name “kingdom of Heaven” (without the article “the”). But we see how much even this designation had lost its spiritual significance by the fact that the mechanical repetition of the Prayer of the Schama was frequently termed “taking upon oneself the kingdom of Heaven” or “the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven.” In the same way, people were to take upon themselves “the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven” by wearing the phylacteries and washing their hands and other external observances (as we know from passages from the Mishnah).

Many passages of the Gospel, also, clearly afford sufficient evidence that a similar material and extrinsic conception of the kingdom of Heaven was widespread in the time of our Lord (cf. Mt 18:1 *et seq.*; 20:20 *et seq.*; Jn 6:15, etc.).

In opposition to such earthly ideas the divine Teacher set up the heavenly image of the true kingdom of God.

## **Chapter 2: The Doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven in the Parables**

### ***The Kingdom: Center of Christ's Life and Preaching***

Mark announces to us the beginning of the public life of our Lord in these words: "And after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God (or the gospel of God) and saying: The time is completed, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:14 *et seq.*). St. Matthew says somewhat more briefly: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say: Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17). St. John the Baptist also proclaimed the coming of the Messiah in the same words: "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Mt 3:2). St. Matthew sums up the whole of our Lord's teaching in the words: "preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Mt 4:23), and our Lord himself, according to St. Luke, describes this as the object of his mission: "To other cities also I must preach the kingdom of God: for I am sent for this purpose" (Lk 4:43).

The glad tidings of the kingdom of God was the starting point and the center of our Lord's whole public life. He was sent to announce this kingdom, to induce men by means of his miracles to believe in his gospel, and to unite all the Faithful in this new kingdom.

The usual terms for this kingdom are "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God." We find the first term repeated some thirty-two times in St. Matthew. The expression "kingdom of God" is employed only four or five times by St. Matthew, while it continually occurs in Mark and Luke to the exclusion of the first expression used by St. Matthew (thirty-three times in St. Luke, and either fourteen or fifteen times in St. Mark). This "kingdom of heaven" is also called simply the "kingdom" (Mt 4:23; 8:12; 9:35; 13:19; 13:38; 24:14. Cf. Lk. 12:32; Acts

1:6; 1 Cor 15:24), the “kingdom of the Father” (Mt 13:43; 26:28. Cf. 6:10), the “kingdom of the Son,” or “of the Son of Man,” or “of Christ” (Col 1:13; Mt 13:41; 16:28; 20:21; Lk 1:33; 22:29-30; 23:42; Jn 18:36; Eph 5:5; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Pt 1:11), and the “kingdom of our Father, David” (Mk 11:10. Cf. Lk 1:32).

Some have tried to make a distinction between the “kingdom of Heaven” and “kingdom of God;” or thought that Christ intended by the former term to express an antithesis to the earthly hopes of the Jews. It has even been suggested that the term “kingdom of heaven” was created by St. Matthew, after every hope of that realization (the kingdom of God on earth) had vanished with the downfall of the Jewish nation.

Such opinions are to be ascribed to pure ignorance of the Jewish mode of expression. The reverence of the Jews for the name of God caused them in many instances to use the word “heaven” (cf. Dan 4:23) instead of “God.” Hence “kingdom of Heaven” was the popular term for the “kingdom of God.” It cannot surprise us that our Lord employed a term familiar to the people, nor that St. Matthew who wrote in Aramaic for the Jewish Christians of Palestine should alone have retained the expression while the others used “kingdom of God” as more intelligible to the pagans who had become Christians. St. Mark and St. Luke by simply using “kingdom of God” in these passages, where St. Matthew says “kingdom of heaven,” show us at the same time that according to their conception both terms have the same meaning. It is by means of the subject matter, not the name, that our Lord shows us the contrast between his doctrine and the false ideas of the Jews.

### ***The Parables: Keys to the Kingdom of God***

Now Christ wished most particularly to illustrate his doctrine regarding the kingdom of Heaven by means of the parables. Therefore, in at least eleven similes he used the introduction “the kingdom of heaven is like” or similar words; but even

where this introduction is wanting, the parables still have everywhere a reference more or less clear to the kingdom of God. The substance of the parables must necessarily be referred to the kingdom of God in the sense which we are about to explain more closely.

In order to understand more clearly the meaning of this expression on the lips of our divine Lord, we must bear in mind the idea which the name suggested to the Jews. First of all, they did indeed understand by it, as we said before, the sovereignty, the power of God in general, and especially the realization of this sovereignty in the theocracy of the Old Testament. But in this kingdom of God they saw not merely God's "sovereignty"—it was to them very much more a concrete "kingdom," a community, whose head was Almighty God and which was governed by Yahweh himself through his earthly representative, who was invested with the divine authority, and in accordance with his laws and constitution. But this kingdom of God should only attain its full perfection through the Messiah.

Thus it was that the more the afflicted people suffered in the present, the more longingly they looked forward to the coming kingdom of the Messiah. It never occurred to them that it would be a spiritual kingdom which should take the place of the synagogue, rejected because of its iniquity. On the contrary, the Jews in the time of our Lord, as we have seen, looked forward to the coming, in the near future, of the kingdom of God as the realization of all their national, earthly dreams. At the same time, in the minds of many, these ideas of the revelation of the kingdom of the Messiah were intermingled with notions of the end of the world and of the kingdom of the Consummation.

It was then to these people that our divine Lord addressed his sermons on the kingdom of Heaven. He used this term in the sense in which it was familiar to the Israelites, but unalloyed by the false earthly ideas introduced therein by the Jews. He came before his people as the Messiah predicted by the

prophets, and, wholly in accordance with their meaning, announced the near approach of his kingdom. Thus in the first place this kingdom is the realization of God's sovereignty over man. For this purpose, the fulfillment of the will of God is above all things necessary: "Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21).

But God's dominion shall not be only over men individually, nor must it be regarded as destined to be realized in these alone. It shall be established in a true and real kingdom, a religious community which shall have as its head the only begotten Son of God, and which shall be governed according to the constitution which he has given and in accordance with his laws. This is the kingdom of the Messiah as foretold by the prophets, and such was the signification attached by all to the name. According to the analogy of the figurative kingdom of God in the Old Testament we may rightly assume that this kingdom of the new covenant shall be ruled by the invisible head through a visible, earthly representative, even if the Gospel afforded us no express information regarding it. How far the visibility of this kingdom appears from the parables themselves must be discovered by examination of the various parables and similies.

Further, this kingdom has indeed its foundation in heaven, whence its King and Founder has descended from the bosom of the Father, and it will have its final consummation again in heaven in the abode of the blessed where Jesus Christ will reign for ever with the saints in glory. It is, in this sense, a true and actual kingdom of heaven, and in many of the utterances of the New Testament writings the term is employed with special reference to this blessed kingdom of glory.

But this glorious epoch of the kingdom triumphant is preceded by the preparatory stage of the time of conflict in the kingdom of God on earth. The community of the new covenant shall be founded on earth for man and in man, and it

shall, indeed, embrace all nations, as was constantly foretold of the kingdom of the Messiah, and shall last to the end of time. The time of conflict shall be followed by the eternal enjoyment of the reward in the kingdom of glory, which shall be given to each one at the end of his day's labor. For both parts of the kingdom are coexistent from its foundation, and their relations are reciprocal. Both represent the one kingdom of heaven of which our Lord reveals to us in the parables so many mysteries, while at one time he has in view more especially the time of preparation on earth and at another refers to the final consummation in heaven.

### ***Three Main Aspects of the Kingdom of God***

In the parables on the kingdom of Heaven we can distinguish three principal points of view. Our Lord shows in the first place to his disciples and partly to the people the true character of the kingdom of the Messiah. He sets before them, in contrast to the false ideas which prevailed in Israel and among the disciples as well, the genesis, the gradual development, the growth, the value, the dignity, the efficiency, and the final consummation of this kingdom. Not earthly treasures, but heavenly are to be hoped for in his kingdom. Therein the conflict will be not with the powers of earth, but with spiritual enemies, above all with the arch-enemy of God and man, their adversary from the beginning, and with him his accomplices—the evil passions of man's heart.

While he thus laid stress upon the spiritual nature of his kingdom, he everywhere opposed the false Jewish views and led his disciples to the understanding of God's designs. God did not will that the new kingdom should be suddenly proclaimed, but that it should grow gradually from insignificant beginnings; nor did he will that there should be at once a complete separation from all evil. The final separation of good and evil is not to take place until the end of the day. He pointed out to them the real cause for the resistance which Israel offered to her Messiah, and prepared

them for the absolute defection of the people and the exclusion of the greater number from his kingdom, as had been predicted by the prophets.

He combined these lessons on the characteristics of the kingdom of heaven with instructions on what should be required from the members of this kingdom. Whenever an opportunity presented itself, he exhorted his hearers in his similes to humble and persevering prayer, to vigilance, to the good use of the gifts and graces which had been lent to them by God. Then he emphatically required of them that they should practice meekness, forgiveness of injuries, mercy; they should have a practical love of their neighbor to be manifested in deeds; they must be detached from earthly things and resolute in the serving of God.

Finally he taught his disciples to know the sovereign of this kingdom, who is indeed Christ himself; he showed them by most beautiful images his dignity and his sentiments, his position in this kingdom, his dignity as its head and its heavenly king.

But above all, he allowed them to look into his divine heart, and revealed to them the boundless treasures of his mercy and of the love which caused him to become a willing victim for them.

Thus do the parables afford us attractive and instructive lessons on the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

### ***Groups of Parables According to Three Aspects of the Kingdom***

To truly understand the kingdom of heaven, one needs to take each parable separately and try to understand it as it came from the thought and lips of the divine Teacher. We can more easily understand the parables if we arrange them, as has been just suggested, in three groups:

I. Parables of the kingdom in its gradual development, its nature, its working:

The Sower  
The Seed Cast Into The Ground  
The Tares Or Cockle (The Weeds & The Wheat)  
The Mustard Seed  
The Leaven  
The Hidden Treasure  
The Pearl Of Great Price  
The Fishing-Net  
The Great Harvest And The Few Laborers  
The Bridegroom And The Wedding Guests  
The Old Garment And The Old Wineskins  
Old And New Wine  
Wayward Children  
Real Defilement  
Uprooted Plants And Blind Leaders Of The Blind  
The Children And The Dogs  
The Kingdom Of Christ And The Kingdom Of Satan  
The Laborers In The Vineyard  
The Two Sons  
The Wicked Husbandmen  
The Marriage Of The King's Son  
The Great Supper  
The Signs Of The End  
The Body And The Eagles

II. Parables of the members of the kingdom of heaven and their obligations:

The Barren Fig-Tree  
The Good Tree And The Bad  
The Pharisee And The Publican  
The Last Place At The Feast  
Poor Guests  
The Rich Fool  
The Vigilant Servants  
The Thief In The Night  
The Faithful Steward  
The Ten Virgins

The Closed Doors  
The Five Talents  
The Pounds  
Unprofitable Servants  
The Good Samaritan  
The Unjust Steward  
The Rich Man And Lazarus  
Serving Two Masters  
The Unmerciful Servant  
The Mote And The Beam  
Pearls Before Swine  
The Son Who Asks His Father For Bread  
The Friend Coming At Midnight  
The Unjust Judge  
The Two Debtors  
The Salt Of The Earth  
The Lamp On The Lampstand  
The City On The Mountain  
The Builder, And The King Going To War  
Disciples, Servants, The Household  
The Prudent Householder  
The House Built On Rock, & The House Built On Sand

III. Parables of the Head of the kingdom of heaven and his position amongst the members:

The Light Of The World  
The Grain Of Wheat  
The Vine  
The King's Son Free From Tribute  
The Physician  
The Good Shepherd  
The Lost Sheep  
The Lost Coin  
The Prodigal Son