

In the days when Jesus walked the earth, the people of Judea were living under Roman domination. They were a conquered people. They had overthrown the tyranny of the Greeks, only to be conquered again by the Romans. They harbored great resentment toward the Roman legions which occupied their land. Jewish patriots, called "Zealots," would gladly take any opportunity to murder Roman soldiers or other officials. The greatest goal in the minds of these defeated people was to reclaim their land and restore their kingdom.

This hope was fueled by Old Testament prophecies (Daniel 9:25) about a coming Savior who would be called "Messiah" (which means "anointed one"). Everyone was looking for Him to appear. When Andrew told Peter about Jesus, he said, "We have found the Messiah" (Jn 1:41). Most people expected the Messiah to be a political leader, a king who would defeat the Romans and provide for the physical needs of His people. They expected the Messiah to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). When Jesus came on the scene, the people found in Him the kind of leader who could defeat any opposition; after all, He could feed scores of troops with only meager rations, He could restore the sick and wounded, and even raise the dead to life again. An army led by Jesus would be invincible! Because of this, many of the multitude believed in Him. In their minds, they could not conceive of anyone performing the signs of Messiah better than Jesus had done (John 7:31). It was their intention to make Him their king (John 6:15). The triumphant entry into Jerusalem, recorded in John 12:13, was a royal reception. The people "took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.'"

However, Jesus did not lead His people in warfare against Imperial Rome. He never lifted a sword. He never spilled a drop of Roman blood. Instead, He laid down His own life and poured out His own blood. Why? Why would Jesus submit Himself to crucifixion when He had the power to prevent it? Why would He not lead the forces of Israel to victory when they had rallied at His feet? They did not reject Him until He was arrested and humiliated; then they thought Him weak, and a false Messiah. After all, how could the Kingdom of God be established by a king hanging on a cross? Jesus answered this question for an equally confused Pontius Pilot, Roman governor of Judea. In John 18:36, Jesus explained it this way: He said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

The people were expecting a physical kingdom; but Jesus came to establish a spiritual kingdom. The "Spiritual" nature of Jesus' Kingdom has always been a difficult concept for some people. Paul said that the crucified Christ was a "stumbling block" to the Jews and "foolishness" to the Gentiles (I Corinthians 1:23). But not for disciples of Jesus. In the epistles of the New Testament, the Hebrew word "Messiah" was replaced by its Greek counterpart, "Christ." And the confident affirmation of first century disciples was very clear, "God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). The spiritual nature of the Lord's kingdom had finally registered. Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed one, the King, the Christ. To deny this was considered spiritual treason. John wrote, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" (I Jn 2:22)

Jesus established a different kind of kingdom than people were expecting. But many people finally caught on and entered into that kingdom. You, too, can be a part of this "Spiritual Kingdom." Maybe you are now; but regardless, you will surely want to learn more about it. The next six "Bible Talks" explore this subject. We shall study prophecies about the kingdom, the beginning of the kingdom, and what the kingdom of God is like. This is going to be an interesting and most important study.

1. What did the people of Israel expect from their “Messiah” in the days of Jesus? (Acts 1:6)

2. What does the word “Messiah” mean?

3. Beside each of these verses, write an explanation of how the people felt about Jesus:

John 7:31 _____

John 6:15 _____

John 12:13 _____

4. Do you think Jesus had opportunity to establish a “physical” kingdom while on earth?

Explain:

5. What kind of kingdom was Jesus planning to establish? (John 18:36)

6. According to I Corinthians 1:23, the concept of a crucified Christ became a _____
_____ to the Jews; and to the Gentiles it was _____.

7. Do you believe Jesus accomplished the mission that God had sent Him to do? (John 17:4)