

The “Kingdom of God”

What Does It Really Mean?

I listen to Christian radio at times and hear the phrase bantered about “Kingdom of God” so often, usually in the context of building up and promoting the Church. Having been a disciple and researcher of God’s word for many decades, I am well aware that the meaning of this phrase is governed mostly by the context in which the word is used. Context, context ... so important in any study of God’s word, and of course we are dealing with words and their meanings. After all the Bible is a collection of words, is it not, 783,137 in the KJV, and 728,969 in the NIV, and it is the meanings we apply to these God-inspired words that carry the day in how we come to know our Creator and His instructions for us to live day by day.

There have been many discourses that have dealt with the meaning of “Kingdom of God” and its closely related phrase, “Kingdom of Heaven.” The word *kingdom* is the Greek *basileia*, used 162 times in the New Testament. The word denotes sovereignty, royal power, and dominion. There can be no kingdom without a king: the word is a compound of “king” and “dominion”; i.e., the king rules over an expanse of land upon which people dwell as subjects to the king, who is the chief authority in the governmental structure. This structure is in contrast to a republic, where the power lies within the people who elect leaders to represent them in some official capacity, such as the president of the United States, and Congress. In such cases the “people” are sovereign.

So often preachers confuse the Kingdom of God with the Church, or *ecclesia*, the body of believers that God has chosen out of the world as His elect. This error is easily proven by the fact that “heirs of the Kingdom” can hardly be equated with “heirs of the ecclesia,” nor can those who “receive the Kingdom” hardly be spoken of as being received by the ecclesia. We read of the elders, messengers, or servants of the churches, but never of elders and messengers of the Kingdom. We read of the children (sons) of the Kingdom but never of sons of the Church, and the names and appellations of the Church are never used of the Kingdom (Ephesians 1:23; 2:21; 4:4, 16; 5:30; Colossians 1:24; I Timothy

3:15).

I could go on to show more differences between the Kingdom and the Church; they simply are not to be identified with each other ... not implying that the ecclesia will not in time inherit the Kingdom in due course.

Variations of the “Kingdom of God”

Several variations of the phrase “Kingdom of God” are used in the New Testament, shown here from the KJV.

1. *The Kingdom of Heaven.* This expression is used only in Matthew, where it is mentioned 32 times, and is a dispensational term used in connection with the Messiah’s rulership *on* earth, and sometimes of the heavenly sovereignty *over* the earth ... but not *from* or *out of* this world. The sovereignty comes from heaven because that is where Jesus Christ now resides.

2. *The Kingdom of the Father* (Matthew 13:45).

3. *The Kingdom of the Son of Man* (Matthew 16:28).

4. *The Kingdom of His Dear Son* (Colossians 1:13).

5. *The Everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (II Peter 1:11).

6. *The Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ* (Revelation 11:15).

Thus we see the Kingdom of God likened to the Kingdom of Heaven, the latter realm being akin to the former since it comes from heaven, but is not centered in heaven. This sovereignty, dominion, or country is under the dominion of a king or monarch, and includes the inhabitants and population within that realm. It is the country that the patriarch Abraham longed for.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth But now they desire a

better, that is a heavenly country ..." (Hebrews 11:13, 16; NKJV).

Preaching the Kingdom Message

Our Lord and Savior began His ministry on earth immediately after the temptation in the wilderness, saying "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven [or God] is at hand" (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; NKJV), the very message that John the Baptist preached not long before (Matthew 3:2). Then throughout His ministry He elucidated parable after parable of this Kingdom in words that unmistakably placed that realm right here on earth.

● ***The Parable of the Sower.*** Found in Mark 4:1-20, Matthew 13:3-23, and Luke 8:5-15, the sower (Jesus, the Word) of the seed (the Word) casts them upon the wayside where birds eat them, on stony ground where they germinate but shrivel, among thorns which choke them out, or on good soil that enables the seeds to grow and yield 30, 60, or 100-fold. The setting of this parable is on the earth, among people with whom the Father and Christ are working. The setting is not in the spirit realm.

● ***The Parable of the Wheat and Tares.*** In Matthew 13:24-30, the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a man (the Father) who sowed seed (the elect) in His field, but at night the enemy (Satan) sowed his seed amongst the wheat. These were the evil doers among the righteous. They were allowed to grow up together, and at harvest time the good wheat grain was separated from the evil tares, which were thrown into the fire while the wheat was gathered into God's barn. Again, this parable transpires upon the earth, not in heaven.

● ***The Parable of the Seed Growing in the Soil.*** Mark 4:26-29 reveals how the Kingdom of God is likened to a farmer scattering seeds on the soil, which sprout to produce grain in a miraculous way, and are then harvested. This pictures the reaping of the elect on the earth. That harvesting is to eternal life at the resurrection, but after that the reign of these elect is, again, on the earth (Revelation 5:10; 20:4; Zechariah 14:8-9).

● ***The Parable of the Mustard Seed.*** This parable, recorded in Mark 4:30-32, Matthew 13:31-32, and Luke 13:18-19 likens the Kingdom of God to a particular species of mustard, which, though its seeds

are small, grows to become a very large plant, so big that even birds may nest in its branches. This message reveals the overspreading of the reign of Jesus Christ and the saints across the entire earth, a takeoff on Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2: "You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:34-35; NKJV).

● ***The Parable of the Leaven.*** This fascinating parable connects placing leavening (yeast) within flour, prepared for bread making, which grew and multiplied until the entire batch of meal was leavened (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21). This Kingdom of God parallel is based on earth, revealing how the government of God will multiply steadily, like yeast cells in bread dough, until every corner of every nation is infected with God's truth.

● ***The Parable of the Treasure in the Field.*** In Matthew 13:44 a very short parable describes a man finding a treasure in a field, who sells all that he has and buys the field to possess the treasure. The treasure worth sacrificing everything for is the partaking in eternal life and God's government on earth, the return to Eden prophesied for all the earth.

● ***The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price.*** Similar to the above parable, Matthew 13:45-46 speaks of a man finding a very valuable pearl so precious that he sold all that he had to possess it. The allusion is to giving up everything one has in this material world to participate in the calling God gives to the elect to become kings and priests within the government of the Creator on earth.

● ***The Parable of the Drag Net.*** Once again in Matthew 13, verses 47 to 50, the Kingdom of God is likened to a fisherman's net which captured all sorts of fish, both good and bad. At the end of the eon the good fish, or inheritors of eternal life, will be separated from the bad fish, those who are evil and destined for destruction ... the setting being on the earth.

Other parables refer to the Kingdom of God in various ways, such as the Parable of the Vinedressers (Mark 12:1-11; Matthew 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-18), the Parable of the Budding Fig Tree (Mark 13:28-32; Matthew 24:32-36; Luke 21:29-33), the Parable of the Faithful Servant (Mark 13:33-37; Matthew

24:42; Luke 12:35-48), the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 28:23-35), the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 24:38-31), the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-12), and the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). These parables refer to Jesus Christ and His return to rule on earth, the signs preceding His return, the need to stay alert for His return, and the qualifications for being a part of the government of God on earth. The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24), while not based upon the earth, describes the wedding feast in the City of God of Revelation 19:7-9, just before Jesus Christ and the saints return to the earth to wage war upon the Beast and False Prophet.

The Core of the Kingdom

With the Kingdom of God being the government of God, then what is the focus of this government? How did Jesus answer Pilate when he said, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33). Jesus answered,

“You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37; NKJV).

Five days before the Passover, just before the crucifixion, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a young donkey, crowds of people exuberantly shouting and laying clothes and tree branches on the road where He rode. They obviously believed He was the prophesied King who would rule over Israel and gain them freedom from Gentile oppression, and restore the prosperity and prestige that Israel once had in Solomon’s day, and which had been prophesied to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That was the promise of a physical nation, the Kingdom of God they were anticipating.

In fact, the very stake on which Jesus was crucified had affixed the title, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19-20), written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, signifying His kingship would be over not only Israel, but over all nations. It

just was not yet time for that government to be installed.

From Eden to Eden

So, let us return to the message that Jesus proclaimed when His ministry began:

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel!’” (Mark 1:14-15; NKJV).

What gospel? *Gospel* (*euangelion*) means glad tidings or joyful news. The gospel of the Kingdom or government of God! The Kingdom was “*at hand*” (*engizo*, to approach or draw near) because the King of that nation was right there announcing its coming. The coming was not immediate, and would not arrive for another two millennia, but the King was there with them!

The Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve dwelled, was a most perfect environment for people to live in endless plenty, peace, joy, and liberty, having abundant, health-giving food and beauty (Genesis 2:9), without pain, suffering, aging, and conflict. The coming Eden, foretold by all of the prophets and summarized by Peter in the pivotal scripture of Acts 3:19-24, will not be restricted to one area of the earth, but will overspread all of the planet’s land mass. It is the reward promised to a people made in the Creator’s express image, who have put away their selfish nature and put on the character of their Maker and Sustainer. It is a new heaven and new earth well worth our participation to fulfill our every hope and dream! For those interested, I have written a book on this very topic, entitled *The Bridge to Eden*, available through Amazon or Xulon.

Though the Kingdom of God is not the ecclesia (Church) and one cannot thus “grow the Church,” those in the ecclesia — the saints who possess the spirit of God — will be inheritors of this Kingdom of God. I hope these words can be an encouragement to all who read them.