

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

THE KINGDOM: WHY TWO NAMES?

The Biblical doctrine of the kingdom of God has suffered greatly from the puerile and erroneous interpretation of many passages in which important truth concerning it is found. As examples I would cite Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:20, 21; Rom. 14:17 and 1 Cor. 15:50. It has also suffered violence by lines of teaching that are contrary to the truth revealed concerning it. This is especially true among those who are partial dispensationalists, who have created great confusion by insisting on a sharp distinction between **the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of God**. This position was made popular by Dr. C. I. Scofield and is capably set forth by Lewis Sperry Chafer in his *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 4, page 26).

That form of interpretation which rides on occasional similarities and passes over vital differences is displayed by those who argue that the kingdom of heaven, as referred to in Matthew, must be the same as the kingdom of God since some parables regarding the kingdom of heaven are reported in Mark and Luke under the designation, *the kingdom of God*. No attempt is made by these expositors to explain why the term kingdom of heaven is used by Matthew only, nor do they seem to recognize the fact that the real difference between that which these designations represent is to be discovered in connection with the instances where they are not and cannot be used interchangeably rather than in the instances where they are used interchangeably. Certain features are common to both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, and in such instances the interchange of the terms is justified. Closer attention will reveal that the kingdom of heaven is always earthly while the kingdom of God is as wide as the universe and includes as much of earthly things as are germane to it. Likewise the kingdom of heaven is entered by a

righteousness exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees (Matt. 5 :20), while the kingdom of God is entered by a new birth (John 3: 1-16).

I, for one, do not want to be guilty of riding on "occasional similarities" while ignoring "vital differences." Nevertheless, after prolonged study which forced a change of opinion, I have the firm conviction that the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are two names for the same thing and that they are identical in every respect. Furthermore, I believe there are sound explanations as to why the term "kingdom of heaven" is used only by Matthew. And I also know that there is no explanation as to why he is the only writer who uses it if we make this term to be something unique and different from the kingdom of God. Can it be that this term represents a distinct truth of great importance of which no other Biblical writer has anything to say save Matthew? Not in the least. Mark and Luke present this same truth under the title of the kingdom of God.

Since the only proper approach to the New Testament is through the Old, it is illogical to interpret Matthew without giving due consideration to revelations in the Hebrew scriptures that have a direct bearing upon the subject.

In Daniel 4, in connection with God's dealing with Nebuchadnezzar, we read, **"that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men"** (Dan. 4: 17). The only kingdom on earth at that time was that of Nebuchadnezzar, and the Most High determined to let him know that no matter how much liberty He permitted him, He still held the sovereignty (the right to govern) in His own hands. So the Most High took him off the throne, caused him to be insane for seven years, then restored him to it with greater majesty than ever before.

When Daniel interpreted the king's vision, he reiterated the divine declaration, "till you know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men," but as he continues, he declares that the king's discipline would be until, "after thou shalt have known that the Heavens do rule" (Dan. 4. 26). Later the declaration concerning the Most High ruling is repeated. Thus we see in this one chapter the following declarations:

"that the Most High ruleth" Dan. 4: 17

"that the Most High ruleth" Dan. 4:25

"that the heavens do rule" Dan. 4:26

"that the Most High ruleth" Dan. 4:32

These four statements express identical truth. In them there is an easy change from "the Most High" to "the heavens." This is because these two terms are synonymous. They can be used interchangeably. No matter what other meanings it may have, the term "the Heavens" in the Old Testament is used as a descriptive title of the Deity. It is also used this way in many places in the New Testament. **There is no difference in meaning between the terms "The kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of the heavens" (as it always reads in the Greek).**

In Matt. 4:12, 17 we are told that after John was cast into prison, "from that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, '**Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**'" Mark, in reporting the same incident, declares that He preached, "**the kingdom of God is at hand**" (Mark 1: 15). If these two terms are identical there is no problem. But if they describe two different concepts, it becomes necessary for us to decide which writer is giving the more accurate report.

This is usually explained by saying that the kingdom of God is a universal sphere of which the kingdom of heaven is a part, and that the name of a part can also be called by the name of the whole, such as calling Colorado the United States. However, this explanation is fraught with serious difficulties. Let us consider two statements as an illustration: (1) He lectured on the mountains of the United States; (2) he lectured on the mountains of Colorado. Either one of these statements can be true, since Colorado is a part of the United States, but it still leaves the question, just what mountains did he speak about? Which report is the most accurate?

In Matt. 5:3 the Lord Jesus said, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**"; but in Luke 6:20 we read that He said, "**Blessed be ye poor: for your's is the kingdom of God.**"

In Matt. 8:11 the Lord Jesus places Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Luke, in reporting the same incident, says that He placed them in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:28). There is no difficulty here if these two terms are identical, which they are.

Matthew reports that when the Lord Jesus sent forth the twelve, He told

them to "go, preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (10:7). But Luke says He sent them to preach the kingdom of God (9:2). If these terms set forth two different concepts, one limited and the other unlimited, then which concept were they supposed to proclaim?

Again Matthew reports that the Lord Jesus spoke of those who were "**least in the kingdom of heaven**" (Matt. 11: 11), while Luke reports that He said, "**least in the kingdom of God**" (Luke 7 :28).

Matthew quotes the Lord as saying that the parables have to do with **the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**" (Matt,13:11), while both Mark (4:11) and Luke (8:10) say they have to do with **"the mysteries of the kingdom of God."**

Matthew reports that the Lord said, "the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed" (13:31), while Mark says He declared it to be a likeness of "the kingdom of God" (4:30-32). Matthew quotes the Lord as saying, "the kingdom of heaven is like unto heaven" (13:33), but Luke reports the Lord as saying it is a likeness of the kingdom of God (Luke 13:20-21).

In all these passages if these two terms mean the same thing, then there are no problems; but if they present two different concepts, then they present problems that cannot be solved. I believe they are synonymous. In one place our Lord used these two terms interchangeably. After His conversation with the rich young ruler, He said to His disciples:

Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the KINGDOM OF GOD (Matt. 19:23,24).

In this passage the two terms are identical and synonymous. We will do well to follow the example of our Lord and use them this way. However, the question posed in the subject of this article has not yet been answered-"Why Two Terms?"

It is well known that the reverence of the Hebrew people for the name of God led them to avoid the use of the divine name as much as possible and to substitute other expressions. A very common substitute was "Heaven," which should not seem strange at all since we do this in English. Note such

sayings as, "an appeal to Heaven," "Heaven help us," and "Heaven only knows." The prodigal son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven" (Luke 15:21). The Lord Jesus asked the Jews, "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men?" (Matt 21:25). Again He said, "He that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by Him that sitteth thereon" (Matt. 23:22). G. Dalman points out rabbinic usage in such phrases as, "by the hand of heaven," "the name of heaven," "the word of heaven," "the mercy of heaven," and "the decrees of heaven," all of which are references to God.

Matthew, writing his gospel with the Hebrew people primarily in mind, as evidenced by his introductory words, made use of this substitution as much as possible in order to give no offense and to make his language as appealing to them as possible.

Thus, after the most careful consideration in which no stone has been left unturned in the search for the truth in regard to this matter, it is my conviction and teaching that the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are identical in meaning and can be used interchangeably by the teacher of God's Word without harming in the least His revelation of truth. However, since in my ministry I feel no need of using a term that will not give offense to the feelings of the Jewish people, I habitually use the term, "the kingdom of God," except in places where I am quoting Scripture verbatim.

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