

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven

1.

The phrase *Kingdom of God* is used 5 times in the gospel of Matthew, 15 times in Mark, 32 times in Luke, 2 times in the gospel of John, 7 times in Acts, and 8 times in Paul's epistles, for a total of 69 occurrences.

The Kingdom of God can either be the reign of God in the Spirit, as God is a Spirit (John 4:24) or in the earth. In other words, it can either refer to the rule of God spiritually, for instance, in an individual, or it can refer to the coming physical kingdom because Christ's Kingdom on earth will be subject to God's spiritual reign.

Compare the following:

Luke 9:27 - *But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.*

Luke 17:20-21 - *And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*

In Luke 9, Jesus specifically tells His disciples that they will see the kingdom of God, referring to Christ's kingdom glory that they witness in the following verses, but in Luke 17 He says it comes *not with observation*. This is because the phrase *kingdom of God* is a general phrase that can refer to either.

In Luke 21:31 Jesus tells His disciples to *look for certain physical signs* to know the kingdom of God is at hand:

So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

Luke 13 also shows us that the phrase *kingdom of God* is sometimes used in reference to the physical kingdom of Christ on the earth:

Luke 13:28-29 - *There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.*

And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

Here, people are said to come from the four corners of the earth, or the four points of the compass, to sit down in the kingdom of God. There is without question a physical kingdom on earth that Christ is to inherit.

Matthew 26:29 - *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

Mark 9:47 - *And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire...*

Both of these verses connect the kingdom of God to *physical* things.

The context has to define whether the phrase *kingdom of God* is to be understood in its spiritual or physical sense.

Here are a few verses to illustrate the *spiritual nature* of the Kingdom of God:

Luke 10:8-9 - *And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.*

Luke 11:19-20 - *And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.*

Luke 17:20-21 - *And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*

Romans 14:17 - *...For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

2.

The phrase *Kingdom of Heaven* occurs 32 times in the Bible, and *every single time* it occurs in the gospel of Matthew. As we've already seen, the gospel of Matthew also uses the phrase *kingdom of God* 5 times.

Why would Matthew use two entirely different phrases? As all scripture is inspired by God, not one word is used carelessly or arbitrarily; every word of God is pure (Proverbs 30:5), and we have to trust that the Holy Spirit knew exactly what He was doing.

The reason two different phrases are used is because the gospel of Matthew has a very distinct purpose.

Only the gospel of Matthew uses two separate phrases to differentiate between the physical and spiritual kingdom because his gospel alone has the intended purpose of showing the leadership of Israel's rejection of Christ and the spiritual kingdom that could only be accessed through Him, and hence giving the explanation as to *why* the physical kingdom didn't come.

The gospel of Matthew presents Christ as the King of Israel. It first connects Jesus's genealogy back to King David (Matt. 1:1 and 1:6), who was given a promise from God that a man who was to proceed from his own body would inherit the Kingdom of Israel, and God would establish the throne of His Kingdom forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

This was and will be a literal, physical throne. The phrase *throne of His glory* is only used twice in the entire Bible, and both times it occurs in Matthew (see Matt. 19:28 and Matt. 25:31). Christ is not currently upon the throne of His glory, but is seated with the Father upon the Father's throne (see Rev. 3:21). He is to sit at the Father's right hand, till He make His enemies His footstool (Psalm 110:1).

This throne will be in Mount Zion, the city of the Great King (Psalm 48:2), which Jesus equates to Jerusalem in Matthew 5:35. In Malachi 1:14, God identifies Himself as *a great King*.

The genealogy of Matthew also connects Jesus back to Abraham (Matt. 1:1-2), who was given a promise of a Seed, a land, and a nation which would be a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:2-3; 13:15; 17:8). This promised Seed will ultimately be the one who inherits the land promised to Abraham, and that Seed is Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Thus, at the outset, Matthew connects Jesus to the promised throne and Kingdom of Israel and to the land of Canaan, and thus to the promises made to "the fathers" (Romans 15:8), identifying Him as the Seed promised to both Abraham and David and the rightful inheritor of the land and Kingdom.

The gospel of Matthew however doesn't just present Jesus as the King of Israel, it recounts the leadership of Israel's rejection of Him and the subsequent "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," in which Jesus explains how and why the physical kingdom was delayed.

From as early as Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist preached saying *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*; in Matthew 4:17, Jesus Himself begins to preach the same. Mark 1:15 says that Jesus preached *the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand*. The prophesied time was ready to be fulfilled and the kingdom was *at hand*, meaning soon to be realized.

In Matthew 5 through 7 Jesus gives what some have called the “constitution of the kingdom,” that is, some of the principles that dictate one’s entrance into that kingdom, and laws that govern that kingdom.

In Matthew 5:3-5, Jesus says,

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

The poor and the meek are to inherit the kingdom of heaven (v3) which is equated with the earth (v5).

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus tells His Jewish audience *Ye are the salt of the earth*, and that *they are the light of the world, a city that is set on a hill*. Again consider Psalm 48:1-2:

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.

Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.

In Matthew 6:10, Jesus tells them to pray,

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

The focus here is clearly an earthly throne and dominion.

Matthew 6:20-21 says,

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

But this must be understood in light of what Jesus says in Revelation 22:12:

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Some of these rewards are described to the seven churches of Revelation 2-3. To lay up treasures in heaven in this context is to earn rewards from God in heaven, who will bring those rewards with Him *when He returns to the earth*.

Jesus goes on in Matthew 6 to explain to His audience the necessity of trusting God before seeking earthly things (6:24-32), and having expressly used the phrase kingdom of heaven for nearly two chapters, He says in 6:33,

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Seek first that which is *spiritual*, and then *all these things*—in context, the physical things after which the gentiles seek (v31-32)—will be added unto you.

In Matthew 10:7, Jesus sends out the 12 to the lost sheep of Israel and commissions them to preach *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

In Matthew 11, Jesus says that from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. This is because John the Baptist first preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and from the beginning the message was met with resistance by the unbelieving Jews.

In the parallel account in Luke 7, Jesus explains this:

And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.
(Luke 7:29-30)

It suffered violence because, as Jesus says in Matthew 23:13,

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

We see the kingdom of heaven suffered violence because the scribes and Pharisees refused it and suffered not others to go in either.

Up until Matthew 13, Jesus ministered to all of Israel, but after the unbelieving Jews accuse Jesus of casting out devils by the power of the devil, Jesus begins to speak in parables, and to confine His ministry to His disciples only. It is only then, after it becomes plain that the leadership of Israel has rejected the spiritual kingdom of God, that Christ begins to reveal that the physical kingdom of heaven will be postponed; from that point on the kingdom of heaven is never said to be “At hand,” nor is it any longer preached.

According to Matthew 24, that gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the seventieth week prophesied by Daniel (the tribulation period) as a witness to all nations and then the end will come, that is, Christ will return and set up that kingdom. But until that time, that gospel cannot be legitimately preached.

In Matthew 12, the unbelieving Jews accuse Jesus of casting out devils by the power of the devil. In 12:28, Jesus tells them,

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

He goes on to explain how the latter end of this wicked generation will be worse than the beginning, because they rejected the spiritual kingdom of God. Jesus came and testified all things to them that the Father had told Him. This is what He says in John 15:22:

If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

They not only rejected His testimony, but attributed to Him the works of Satan. And so He begins to speak in parables, and He tells us exactly why. The disciples ask Him in Matthew 13:10,

Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

And He responds,

Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. (v11)

In Matthew 13 then we see the beginning of the Kingdom of Heaven parables. There are 12 kingdom of heaven parables given, as 12 is the number of divine government in the earth. The twelve apostles will have 12 thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. There will be 144,000 Jews, 12,000 from each tribe, who may possibly be given responsibility over 30 degrees of each section of the earth, as dominions, principalities, and powers, through which Christ will rule the nations with a rod of iron. For there are thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, both visible and invisible, by which Christ is going to reign (Col. 1:16).

Deuteronomy 32:8 says,

When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.

God divided the nations according to the number of Israel's sons because the believing remnant that comes from those tribes will rule with God in the earth.

Consider Revelation 2:26-27:

²⁶ *And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:*

²⁷ *And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.*

The Kingdom of Heaven parables are given to disclose the “mysteries of the kingdom” to the disciples, but to hide them from the unbelieving Jews (Matt. 13:10-13).

The *mysteries* of the Kingdom of heaven relate to the abeyance, or delay, of the coming of the physical, Messianic Kingdom on earth, and to explain that the King is going away to a far country for a season (that is, heaven), before He returns again.

The kingdom of heaven in these 12 parables often describes the current state of the kingdom of heaven, that is, the only kingdom God ever set up on the earth—Israel. That current state is one of corruption, unbelief, and apostasy.

Because of Israel’s continued rebellion the Kingdom had been taken from them and given over to the gentiles (what Luke 21:26-27 calls *the times of the gentiles*); see Ezekiel 21:26-27, Lamentations 5:16, Daniel 4:17).

The Millennial reign of Christ is the kingdom in which God’s Spiritual Kingdom once again rules over the physical creation. It is where the Kingdom of God and Kingdom of heaven “overlap” if you will. This is why the same statements are made in the varying gospel accounts using these two phrases interchangeably. The Kingdom Christ is to inherit is both spiritual *and* physical.

The kingdom of God involves both heaven and earth, and can refer to either the physical or spiritual. This is why Paul specifically only uses the phrase Kingdom of God, as we live at a time when the physical kingdom has been postponed.