

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND OF HEAVEN AND OF THE FATHER AND SON OF MAN

There is but one kingdom throughout all the ages, as to its fundamental principles and constitution, but it is presented in Scripture under different **aspects** and **phases**.

It may be considered as having *three divisions*:

First, its **aspect**: looked at from different points of view, as the **Kingdom of God**, the **Kingdom of Heaven**, the **Kingdom of the Son** and the **Father's Kingdom**.

Secondly, its **phases**: past, present and future.

Thirdly, its **constitution**: its characteristic principles; its subjects — those who enter into it and those who do not enter; the way and manner of entering; the blessings and privileges to be enjoyed in it.

THE THREE ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM

The *four names* by which these are set forth are not employed to describe any essential difference of meaning in either the constitution or character of the Kingdom itself; but rather to mark the various applications or aspects in which it is presented, with reference to different external circumstances, or to different persons addressed.

Thus it is presented:

1. In a general and comprehensive way to the world at large as the **Kingdom of God**
2. To the Jews dispensationally as the **Kingdom of (the) heavens**
3. To the saints of the present era in a special and confidential way as the **Kingdom of the Son** and the **Father's Kingdom**.
Hence the phrases Kingdom of God and Kingdom of heaven, which have substantially the same meaning, are often used interchangeably in the Gospels, as the following instances clearly show.

Kingdom of God (to the world)

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| 1. Luke 6: 20. | 5. Luke 7: 28. | 9. Luke 13: 20, 21. |
| 2. Mark 1: 14, 15. | 6. Luke 16: 16. | 10. Luke 18: 17; Mark 10: 15. |
| 3. Luke 13: 28, 29. | 7. Luke 8: 10; Mark 4: 11. | 11. Luke 18: 16; Mark 10: 14. |
| 4. Luke 9: 2. | 8. Luke 13: 19; Mark 4: 30, 31. | 12. Luke 18: 24; Mark 10: 23, 24. |

Kingdom of Heaven (to the Jews)

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| 1. Matthew 5: 3. | 5. Matthew 11: 11. | 9. Matthew 13: 33. |
| 2. Matthew 4: 17. | 6. Matthew 11: 12. | 10. Matthew 18: 3. |
| 3. Matthew 8: 11. | 7. Matthew 13: 11. | 11. Matthew 19: 14. |
| 4. Matthew 10: 7. | 8. Matthew 13: 31. | 12. Matthew 19: 23. |

On carefully examining the above it will be seen that the corresponding pairs relate to the very same events and teaching of our Lord respectively: they have the same meaning, only differing in the mode of circumstances of presentation.

Kingdom of the Son and the Father (to the saints)

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| 1. Matthew 13:43 | 3. Matthew 16:28 |
| 2. Matthew 26:29 | 4. Matthew 13:41 |

FIRST ASPECT: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In this view the Kingdom is presented in its widest and fullest aspect; and presents to us the entire rule of God throughout the ages. The whole Kingdom of God is thus seen as originated and sustained by the infinite love, wisdom and power of God Himself; embracing all the forms and developments of His rule in every stage of the history of believers, from the beginning to the end of the world. In its full comprehensiveness it includes all the other aspects.

It is the generic term of the whole series of expressions employed. Hence we see how the more comprehensive term Kingdom of God can be used interchangeably with the other aspects (as in the instances given above) because the greater includes the less; so that in certain cases what is true of the Kingdom of God must also be true of the Kingdom of heaven, although in some other cases this interchange might not be used exactly in the reverse way.

It is therefore in this aspect that it is most commonly presented to the world at large, in a general way, in contrast to the kingdoms of men on the earth. "Thine is the kingdom O Lord, and Thou art exalted above all" (1 Chron. 29: 11); "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations" (Psalm 145: 13; Dan. 4: 3).

Of all the forms of expression used to set forth the rule of God, the words "Kingdom of God" are most frequently employed, numbering in all some 72 times in the Gospels, Acts and Epistles. Then, if the passages containing the word "Kingdom" alone which appears to have exactly the same application, both in the Old and New Testaments be added, we shall have about 101 references in all under this head.

SECOND ASPECT: THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

In this aspect the ruling power of the Kingdom is looked at as originating in, and coming down from heaven, and thus heavenly in character, though exercised on the earth. It is the rule of God from the heavens above over the earth in contradistinction to the rule of earthly sovereigns on the earth. "The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom ruleth over all" (Psalm 103: 19); "The heavens do rule" (Dan. 4: 26).

It has mainly a two-fold dispensational application; first, to the spiritual and invisible rule of God in the hearts of believers during the present interval; and secondly, to the visible reign of Christ in the Millennium. In both these applications the rule is looked at as from the heavens above, and is therefore called the Kingdom of heaven. Having thus a distinct dispensational aspect, it is more limited than the wider aspect of the Kingdom of God, that covers all periods.

Another peculiarity of this aspect is that it is specially represented in this form to the Jewish nation; chiefly in view of its ultimate establishment on the earth, when the Jews as a nation shall be restored under the reign of their Messiah. Hence we do not find the words Kingdom of heaven in any other book of the Bible than in the Gospel of Matthew, which we know is more particularly addressed to the Jews, and bears a Jewish character throughout. In this Gospel the phrase occurs 33 times. But it is important to observe that while it bears this special Jewish application, in one view of it, it does not follow that the Kingdom of heaven in itself is more Jewish in character than the other aspects of it, as sometimes erroneously assumed.

It is for obvious reasons that it is only in this particular mode of the expression the kingdom is presented to the Jews. One important reason was that the Jews, who were always looking for an earthly kingdom, and rightly, were apt to think that the promised Messiah might be some great Israelitish leader like Moses, of human origin, and not the Son of God from heaven. Therefore it was necessary to constantly remind them that though their kingdom on earth should be most blessed, it was to be ruled over from the heavens above, the Kingdom of the heavens: and that the Messiah of Divine origin was to come down from heaven, even as John Baptist testified, "He that cometh from above is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth; He that cometh from heaven is above all" (John 3: 31).

THIRD AND FOURTH ASPECTS: THE KINGDOM OF THE SON AND THE FATHER'S KINGDOM.

In the third, Christ the Son of God appears, taking His place as sovereign ruler of the Kingdom committed to Him from the beginning by His Father, when it is specially seen as "His Kingdom." All the allusions, some 21, under this head, refer exclusively to the Millennium, when Christ shall take His power and sit on His throne to reign over the earth.*

{*One exception is the presentation of the kingdom as the "kingdom of His dear Son" in Colossians 1: 13, into which we have even now been translated.

So also the four passages in which the Father's kingdom is set forth refer to the Millennium; and both these aspects are presented to the saints, the inner circle of sure believers (not to the world or to the Jews), in which we see the Lord graciously and lovingly associating His followers with Himself and the Father in all the glory and honour of His Millennial reign.

THE THREE PHASES OF THE KINGDOM

As this is the most important branch of the subject and perhaps the most difficult, upon which so much has been written, and with regard to which so many conflicting opinions have been entertained, it is necessary to dwell more on it than on any of the other branches. But all that can now be done is to give the three abbreviated definitions of these phases, as follows:

THE PAST PHASE OF THE KINGDOM

The introductory announcement of the Kingdom as set forth in the ministry of John the Baptist and of our Lord; who preached repentance and salvation to the Jews only, in view of the coming kingdom, then said to be at hand. This was the "Gospel of the Kingdom" (Matthew 4: 23; 9: 35), and is quite different from the "Gospel of the grace of God" now preached.

THE PRESENT PHASE OF THE KINGDOM: TRANSITION (IN MYSTERY)

A transitional and parenthetical stage of the Kingdom, during which the visible presence of the King is absent; while certain results are produced by the present preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God to all, whereby believers are gathered out from the world, to come under the spiritual rule of Christ in the church; and nominal Christians by mixing with the true form what is commonly known as Christendom, which represents — as a whole — the present phase of the kingdom of heaven.

THE FUTURE PHASE OF THE KINGDOM: ITS CONSUMMATION

The Kingdom prophetically announced and described, as seen prospectively in actual power and glory especially on earth, when Christ as King of kings shall reign with His saints over the earth during the Millennium.

These phases constitute three distinct dispensations, in which the characteristic features of each are entirely different. To confound them together is the cause of much misunderstanding and confusion.

As to the *constitution* of the Kingdom, it may be traced out by referring to all the passages that fall under the above four subdivisions.