

God's Heavenly Kingdom: A Person, A Place and A Promise

The kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of God are often used interchangeably in the gospels. In reading these synoptic gospels, the question can reasonably be asked: Does Jesus mean Heaven when He mentions the Kingdom of God? I believe the answer is yes.

Matthew wrote primarily for Jewish readers and Mark and Luke wrote predominately for Gentiles. For instance, Matthew's gospel states that Jesus says, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matthew 6:17) and Mark states that Jesus began preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, saying, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel*" (Mark 1:19).

Attempting to abide by the Ten Commandments, Jews tried to minimize the possibility that they might unwittingly take the name of the Lord in vain (Exodus 20:7) by using other words for God. Heaven was a favorite substitute. Matthew, writing for Jewish readers, speaks of the kingdom of heaven in the same way that Mark and Luke speaks of the kingdom of God.

It helps me to think of all these references as God's heavenly kingdom. He owns everything. "*Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool*" (Isaiah 66:1).

Jesus said that His is a Heavenly Kingdom. "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here*" (John 18:36).

A Person

My husband Richard once preached a sermon on Luke 23:39:43, *Today you shall be with Me in Paradise*. He mentioned that the word *paradisos* is used here and two other times in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 12:4 and Rev. 2:7), each time clearly referring to Heaven.

He said,

"With all its splendors, the object of the believer's desire is not so much a place, but a Person: the Prince of Heaven, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. We desire Heaven not merely for its splendor, not so much for freedom from sorrow and pain, nor even for the joy of being reunited with loved ones. That which is our hope and joy is Jesus. He is the glory of Heaven: He is all our desire; "Whom have I in heaven but Thee" (Ps. 73:25)? Heaven would not be complete without Jesus."

In his book *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, E. W. Bullinger says that when Psalm 73:9 states *They set their mouth against the heavens*, the meaning is "against God, Who dwells there. The rest of the verse confirms this — 'Their tongue (Met. for words)

walketh through the earth.' Here "earth" is put for the people who dwell upon it; and so "heaven" is put for Him who dwells there. "Heaven" is frequently put for "God," who dwells there. We say "Heaven forbid," "Heaven protect us," etc. So the lost son says, "I have sinned against heaven." He means, against God!"

A Place

Although the Greek word translated "kingdom" refers primarily to sovereignty and dominion and not necessarily a geographical location, God declares that the kingdom of Heaven is His dwelling place in Deuteronomy 26:15, 1 Kings 8:30, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Isaiah 66:1, Matthew 6:9.

For those who trust in Christ, the kingdom of Heaven is a reality, both as a dominion and a place.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3, 10). But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14).

A Promise

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15 NIV)

Jesus did say that His kingdom was not of this world, but for our sakes and through His sacrifice, He won the battle for the earthly kingdom which He always rightly owned but allowed Satan to rule for a while. *Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:24).* When Satan is ousted permanently from this world, the promise is that he will be gone forever. Christ will reign forever.

The Church, the Bride of Christ, will also reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12). With an eternal perspective, the challenges of life take on new meaning. We are in the world, but not of it. We don't belong to the world. We belong to Jesus (John 15:19).

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

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