

Episode #423 The Kingdom of God 6 – The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God

I. As expressed in my message on “The Theme of the Bible,” I believe that the Kingdom of God is the theme of the Word of God. Christ is the Main Character, and salvation is the most crucial first thing for us to know, true. Yet the Kingdom of God is the ultimate theme of all God has written. We will now study that theme, and see what God teaches about His Kingdom.

II. It is my belief that the phrase “kingdom of heaven” and the phrase “kingdom of God” are the exact same thing, and what they refer to is identical in every respect.

- A. Yet this is not the opinion of all. Some make out that the kingdom of heaven is limited in scope and has to do with Israel and God reigning on the earth.
- B. The kingdom of God, they argue, is universal in scope, and has to do with God’s sovereignty over all peoples and realms, and over all of time and space.
- C. They would accuse us of emphasizing the similarities and ignoring the differences between these two. We do not wish to do this. Yet I believe no differences exist.

III. The word “heaven” can be used as an alternate name for “God.”

- A. The English word “heaven” comes from “to heave” or lift up, then exalt.
 - 1. In old English it was used of a platform above the stage, the ceiling of a room, the sky that holds clouds and in which birds fly, the solar system, and the stars. The same is true of *shemayim* in Hebrew and *ouranos* in Greek.
 - 2. The word can also have to do with exaltation, rather than physical location. The heaven where God dwells is “the exalted place.” (Could it be in the north? Psalm 75:6-7. Yet we should not make too much of this.)
 - 3. Heaven as the exalted place is “above” us whether it is “up” or not.
- B. Heaven can also be used of men who are exalted above others.
 - 1. Psalm 89:5-6, the “heavens” and the “sons of the mighty” are the same! This speaks of those who rule as “heavens.”
 - 2. Colossians 1:23. Was the gospel really preached everywhere under the sky?
 - a. The gospel was not preached in the United States, China, Australia, etc. at this time.
 - b. “Heaven” here means Caesar!
 - c. Romans 10:18-19. It had gone everywhere there were Israelites.
- C. Heaven can also refer to God, Who is exalted above all others.
 - 1. Daniel 4:17, 25. Tells us the Most High rules in the kingdom of men.
 - 2. Daniel 4:26. Tells us heaven rules.
 - 3. Daniel 4:32. Tells us the Most High rules in the kingdom of men.
 - 4. When considered together, these verses demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that the word “Heaven” can be used as another name for God.

IV. There is no difference between the concepts of “the kingdom of God” and “the kingdom of heaven” in the gospels.

- A. Matthew 4:17. The Lord preached the kingdom of heaven. Mark 1:14-15. The Lord preached the kingdom of God. Did the Lord preach two different things here?
- B. Matthew 5:3. The poor in spirit receive the kingdom of heaven. Luke 6:20. The poor receive the kingdom of God. Do the poor in spirit of Matthew receive something different from the poor of Luke?

1. Some would reply that the kingdom of heaven is a smaller sphere that operates under the kingdom of God, so the greater includes the lesser in these parallel passages.
 2. If I were to say, “the mountains in America are covered by snow this time of year,” and then I were to say, “the mountains in Colorado are covered by snow this time of year,” is it not clear that I have said two very different things? The mountains in Colorado might be covered with snow and other mountains in America might not be. One statement would be more accurate.
 3. If these are different, which is more accurate? Will the poor in spirit receive the kingdom of heaven only, or will they receive the entire kingdom of God?
- C. Matthew 8:11. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be in the kingdom of heaven. Luke 13:28. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be in the kingdom of God. Will the patriarchs be in two different places?
- D. Matthew 10:7. The twelve were to preach the kingdom of heaven. Luke 9:2. The twelve were to preach the kingdom of God. Were these men supposed to preach two different things?
- E. Matthew 11:11. The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist. Luke 7:28. The least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist. Will these “least” be in two different places?
- F. Matthew 13:11. The disciples were given the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Mark 4:11. The disciples were given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Luke 8:10. The disciples were given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Were the disciples given to know two different sets of mysteries?
- G. Matthew 13:33. The kingdom of heaven is compared to leaven. Luke 13:20-21. The kingdom of God is compared to leaven. Are these parables about two different things?
- H. Matthew 19:23-24. Here, the terms “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are used interchangeably!
- I. If the kingdom of heaven is earthly and limited, while the kingdom of God is His universal sovereignty, then why does only Matthew teach about the kingdom of heaven? Is it really likely that only Matthew would speak of this special subject? Is it not much more likely that Matthew merely uses a special phrase that speaks of the same thing spoken of under the phrase “kingdom of God” in the other gospels?
- V. Why does Matthew use this special phrase?
- A. Exodus 20:7. The Jews took this injunction seriously. They decided you could never take His name in vain if you never said it!
 - B. The name “heaven” became one of the substitutes they used for the name of God. We do the same when we say “heaven help us” or “heaven only knows.”
 - C. Matthew was writing to Jews who had this sensitivity. He uses the substitutionary phrase they would prefer, “kingdom of heaven.” Mark and Luke use the phrase that tells what this really means, “kingdom of God.”
- VI. Conclusion: The phrase “kingdom of heaven” in Matthew was used to be sensitive to the Jews who were reluctant to say the name of God. This phrase meant nothing different than the phrase “kingdom of God” that Mark, Luke, and the other New Testament authors used. These two kingdoms are the same thing!