



Conducted by
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"If the Kingdom of Heaven is the same institution as the Church, why should two different descriptions be used? Was 'Kingdom of God' an inadequate expression, or is there a vital difference between 'Kingdom of God' and 'Church of Christ?'"

During my early days in the Church, one used to hear many fine sermons and lessons on the 'Kingdom'. Much of the teaching was used to counter premillennialism. Today we do not hear much teaching about the kingdom, but it is undoubtedly true that there are still many people in the world who believe that because Israel rejected the King, the Kingdom which God wanted to establish was postponed until the second coming of Christ (when presumably He would literally reign on earth occupying the literal throne of David). However, this scriptural argument is outside the scope of this question, although it may impinge on the answer in some shape or form. So it seems we shall have to explore the differences (if any) of the titles Kingdom of God; Kingdom of Heaven; and the Church.

KINGDOM OF GOD

'Kingdom' denotes sovereignty, royal power, dominion, etc. It is the territory or the people ruled over by the king. When applied to God it is His sovereign rule over the universe. (See 1 Chron. 29:10-12.) On this basis rests the doctrine of His unlimited power and domination in the natural and spiritual realm: He is the Creator of the universe. More on this point later.

It is quite obvious that there must have been rebellion against the rule of God before the world was created, hence Satan and his host. On earth, God gave His laws to a nation and expected willing obedience from them. He appointed kings in that nation to administer His Kingdom. However, that nation also rebelled against His rule and authority. We understand, of course, that God's Kingdom cannot include those who are in rebellion against Him. Therefore, as a general principle, we can say that the Kingdom of God, at any given time and place, is where His sovereign rule is acknowledged.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God should come, He replied, **"The Kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is', because the Kingdom of God is within you"**. Luke 17:20,21. N.I.V. The Kingdom is not going to be visible, as was the nation of Israel. You will no doubt recall that Jeremiah prophesied, **"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will make my law in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"** Jer. 31:31-33. The Kingdom to be established, then, would be a spiritual one, as Jesus indicated to Nicodemus, **"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"**. John 3:3. Jesus goes on to indicate that unless that new birth is by water and the Spirit, then a person cannot enter the kingdom of God. We should also notice that since all the world is condemned under sin, then the establishment of such a Kingdom must inevitably be by grace, and that, of course, by the gracious hand of God.

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

It is recorded in 2 Tim. 4:18 that Paul, in captivity, said, **"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his Heavenly Kingdom"**. In Eph.

5:5 we read, ". . . hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God". This kingdom is identical with the Kingdom of the Father Matt. 26:29, and the Kingdom of the Son Luke 22:30. This leads us to the conclusion that there is but one Kingdom, which is variously described as of the Son of Man, Matt. 13:41; of Christ Jesus, 2 Tim. 4:1; of our Lord and His Christ, Rev. 11:15.

God, of course, is above all dispensations. I have always found it easier to understand if I look upon God as delegating authority and rule in both Old and New Dispensations; to kings in the Old, and to Christ in the New. Visible Israel failed God and so a new covenant relationship was established which included the Gentiles; there was to be a new 'Israel of God', and as Jeremiah prophesied, it would be of a spiritual nature, and it would acknowledge the reign of the new King, the Christ of God. (We should not forget that Christ, before Pilate, affirmed that He was a King, and that he had a kingdom which was not of this world). We should always remember that if God delegates authority and accountability that He has ultimate power to do so, and that He Himself has the ultimate authority and accountability. This is made clear in 1 Cor. 15:23-28.

It is also true that there will be those in the Heavenly Kingdom from both dispensations; those who remain faithful to God. In Heb. 11, the writer catalogues the faith of those in the Old Dispensation. In vv 39,40, he says that these had not received the promise, "God having provided some better thing for us, that **they without us** should not be made perfect". That 'better thing' we read about in Heb. 9:15ff.

The words 'heaven' and 'earth' make a contrast of ideas. It seems - and I believe - that the saints on earth are part of the Heavenly Kingdom. As I pointed out earlier, our God is God of the Universe, and His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, is a general term for the Kingdom at any time in the world, and ultimately the sphere of God's rule will become identical with the sphere of Christ's rule at the final consummation of all things. See Rev. 11:15 R.S.V. In the meantime, Christ reigns over His saints on earth.

THE CHURCH

I mentioned earlier that the Kingdom was not going to be visible; that is because its inception in the hearts and minds of people was and is spiritual by nature. However, the ones so motivated by the Spirit, and who are subject in Christ's Kingdom, form the Church here on earth. Jesus commenced His reign when He was received up into glory. 1 Tim. 3:16. On the first Pentecost after the ascension, Peter, through the Spirit said, "**Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord (God) said unto my Lord (Christ), Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ**". Acts 2:33-36. See also Heb. 1:3, and Col. 1:13. He will sit there, according to Paul in 1 Cor. 15, until the last enemy, death, is conquered. After that He will surrender the kingdom to God. See 1 Cor. 15:24-28 again. I think we can say at this point that there will be no millennial reign on earth on any Davidic throne. The way to the throne in Heaven was by the way of the Cross on earth.

CONCLUSION

This is a big subject and I'm afraid I have only been able to 'trim the edges', as it were, but I have tried to keep my answer so that the points made in the question may become a little clearer.

The Kingdom of Christ - the Heavenly Kingdom - is identical with the Church. There can be little doubt of this, especially when Jesus gave 'the keys of the Kingdom' to Peter, who duly opened the door when he preached the first Gospel message at Pentecost. Matt.

16:16-19. It is also worth noting that the other Apostles were given the 'keys' to the Kingdom. Matt. 18:18.

As regards 'Kingdom of God' and 'Kingdom of heaven', these are sometimes interchangeable. There *is* a difference, but it is only a difference of time and place; *there is no inadequacy*. In the final analysis, the Kingdom of Christ will be surrendered to God so that God can be all in all.

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