

An unsorted collection of resources on the “Kingdom of God/Heaven”

There is no material difference between the terms “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God”. ... The combination “kingdom of heaven” is the literal translation of the Hebrew *malkuth shamaim*. Matthew’s almost invariable use of the term “kingdom of heaven” is connected with the fixed Jewish linguistic usage in which the name of God was usually avoided. Probably Jesus (just like John the Baptist) made use of this current combination. On the other hand, it is understandable that Mark and Luke, who addressed the Christians that were originally pagan, and spoke in a direct way of the “kingdom of God.” It is therefore more likely that the latter expression is secondary to the former. (*The Coming of the Kingdom*, Herman Ridderbos, pages 18 – 19, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company)

In Greek, *basiliea* may mean both kingship, kingly dominion, and kingdom. There is no doubt that the former sense, especially that of dominion as the exercise of royal dignity, is the most prominent usage of the word in the various central pronouncements about the “kingdom of heaven” in the gospels. The spatial meaning of kingdom is then a secondary one. When the text says that the *basileis toon ouranoon* “is at hand” (Matt 3:2; 4:17, etc.); “is nigh at hand” (Luke 21:31); “cometh” or “is coming” (Luke 17:20; Mark 11:10); “should appear,” (Luke 19:11); or “may come” (Matt. 6:10), we should not in the first place think of a spatial or a static entity which is descending from heaven but rather of the divine kingly rule actually and effectively starting its operation; therefore we should think of the Divine action of the king. (Ridderbos, pages 24 – 25)

The kingdom of God is not a state or condition, not a society created and promoted by men (the doctrine of the “social gospel”). It will not come through an immanent earthly revolution, nor through human moral action; it is not men who prepare it for God. All such thoughts mean a hopelessly superficial interpretation of the tremendous thought of the fullness and finality of God’s coming as king to redeem and to judge. Viewed from the human standpoint, therefore, the kingdom of heaven is in the first place something to keep praying and waiting for with perseverance. Its coming is nothing less than the great divine break-through, the “rending of the heavens” (Isaiah 64:1), the commencement of the operation of the divine *dunamis* (Mark 9:1). The kingdom of heaven is, therefore, absolutely transcendent in its origin, it is the revelation of God’s glory (Matt, 16:27; 24:30; Mark 8:38; 13:26, etc.). ... The kingdom is not only concerned with God, it also originates with him. Its coming is only to be understood on the basis of his miraculous and all-powerful action. (Ridderbos, page 24)

The idea of the coming of the kingdom is pre-eminently the idea of the kingly self-assertion of God, of his coming to the world in order to reveal his royal majesty, power and right. This absolutely theocentric idea of the kingdom of heaven should always be borne in mind, if we want to have a correct insight into the general purport of Jesus’ preaching. It is the [page 20] basic motive of all his preaching. It explains why from the outset the announcement of the fullness of time had a two-fold content both with Jesus and with John the Baptist, namely that of redemption and that of judgment. The one as well as the other is the direct consequence of the plan of God. The kingdom means redemption, because God maintains his royal justice towards those who put their trust in him as his people. And it means judgment because God maintains his royal will in opposition to all who resist his will. This excludes any nationalistic element. (Ridderbos, pages 19 – 20)

This absolutely theocentric character of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ preaching also implies that its coming consists entirely in God’s own action and is perfectly dependent on his activity. (Ridderbos, pages 23 – 24)

A dominion to be effective must create or maintain a territory where it can operate. So the absence of any idea of a spatial kingdom would be very strange. Moreover in John's and in Jesus' preaching there are clearly some other facets besides that at the irresistible motive power of the coming kingdom. There is also the question of the consummation of the kingdom as *a state* of peace and happiness in which the blessed shall "sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Matt. 8:11); "eat bread" (Luke 14:15); "drink of the fruit of the vine" (Matt. 26:29, cf. 22:1ff). The kingdom is represented as *an order of things* in which there will be "superiors and inferiors" (Matt. 5:19; 11:11; 18:1,4); as an imperial *order* in which the king sits on his throne and his ministers to his right and left (Matt. 20:21); in which the righteous shall shine, and from which the wicked shall be cast away (Matt. 13:43). In another passage the conception seems to be rather that of a certain *spiritual atmosphere* which is internally alien to one, or for which one maybe fit (Luke 9:62; Mark 12:34). The kingdom is occasionally denoted as a certain *good* that ought to be "sought," on account of the salvation it implies (Matt. 6:33; cf. 7:7; 13:14); a *gift* from the Heavenly Father (Luke 12:32), allotted to some (Matt. 5:3,10; 19:14) and "taken away" from others (Matt. 21:43); a gift that can be "inherited," "taken possession of," "taken by force" (Mat 25:34; 11:12); and that is being "prepared" by God for his chosen people (Matt. 20:23; 25:34, etc.). All these passages prove the great variety of conceptions and also the fact that the meaning of the kingdom should not be forcibly narrowed down by absolutizing a certain sense or facet of the kingdom at the expense of others. (Ridderbos, page 26)

Although the New Testament teaches us that the people of Christ's Kingdom are his obedient followers, his Church, there is never the slightest hint that the visibly existing church can either be or produce that Kingdom.

There is no tendency in the New Testament to identify the visible church with the Kingdom of God. The church that makes such an identification will soon begin to invite God to endorse its own very human policies and practices, will equate the people of God with those nice people who share its particular beliefs and participate in its services, and will reckon the advance of the Kingdom in terms of its numerical growth. But it will not be the New Testament church! Such an identification is a great snare, as prophets since Amos have told us. It only fathers the fatuous conceit of rightness with God by external conformity, and the equally fatuous expectation of divine protection -- for, forsooth, this is his church! Not so the New Testament! The Church is indeed the people of the Kingdom of Christ, but the visible church is not that Kingdom. On the contrary, let it take heed to itself, lest by its behavior it becomes so much lukewarm water to be spewed out of mouth of God (Rev. 3:16)! Let it live in full awareness that it, too, is under the judgment of God (Rom. 2:5; 14:10; I Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 11 Cor. 5:10). It, too, the new and pure Israel, must be purged! The church is like a wheatfield in which a good many weeds have come up (Matt. 13:24-30). Weeds and wheat now grow side by side in it, but God (and only God: vss. 28-29!) will know how to separate them. (The Kingdom of God, John Bright, page 236)

Outside of the Gospels the expression 'Kingdom of God' is not very common in the New Testament, while in the Old Testament it does not occur at all. ... It involves the whole notion of the rule of God over his people, and particularly the vindication of that rule and people in glory at the end of history. That was the Kingdom which the Jews awaited. (The Kingdom of God, John Bright, page 18)

That Jesus is indeed to be seen as the great Founder of the Church is, we believe, beyond question. To be sure, it was not his aim to found a new religion, and he certainly did not set up the organization of any particular church -- not even that of your denomination! To test our ecclesiastical institutions by the teachings of Jesus and the apostles is right and proper, and only what we ought to do. But the attempt to prove that they, and they alone, had their origin and authentication there has often enough produced results both amazing and amusing -- and not a little tragic. It is to be doubted if the Lord of the Church would approve of such procedures. In that sense of the word Jesus founded no church at all. But the church is vastly more than that. Jesus founded no ecclesiastical organization, not even the loosest sort, but as

Messiah he came to call out the Remnant. In that true Israel which was obedient to his call lie the seeds of his Church, his *ekklesia* (i.e., the ones called out). There is, therefore, no need to ask after the origins of the Church as though it were founded on a given date, say with Peter's confession (Matt. 16:16-17) or at Pentecost (Acts 2; cf. 1:8). The Church was founded on no date and can observe no formal anniversary. It began with those few about Jesus who had been obedient to the call of the Kingdom. Nay, it began in the Old Covenant longing for the true Israel of God's purpose. (The Kingdom of God, John Bright, page 225)

Christ, then, announced that the Kingdom of God had come into the world, and he summoned men to that Kingdom. (The Kingdom of God, John Bright, page 224)

In New Testament theology the Kingdom of God is not only the goal of all history and the reward of all believers, not only the norm by which all human behavior is judged, it is a new order which even now bursts in upon the present one and summons men to be its people. Its summons demands response, and that response is obedience and righteousness here and now....

Exactly here is the relationship of social gospel to gospel of individual salvation, and it is important that we get it. ... They are as intimate to each other as the opposite sides of the same coin. ... We have not two gospels, social and personal, which vie for the limelight. We have one gospel, the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and it is both. We have simply nothing else to preach. (The Kingdom of God, John Bright, page 223-224)

There are very few verses in the New Testament which equate the Kingdom with the Church, but these very verses support our conclusions. (Revelation 5:9-10 cited). This song of the twenty-four elders identifies all the redeemed as a Kingdom. Do we not therefore have the Scriptural precedent to identify the Church with the Kingdom of God? Only in this sense: the redeemed are a kingdom because they shall reign upon the earth. They are not a kingdom because the members of the Church are the people over whom Christ exercises His reign. They are not a kingdom because the Church is the sphere or realm in which the blessings of the redemptive reign are to be experienced. The Church is a kingdom because it shares Christ's rule. The Kingdom of God in this verse is not the realm of God's reign; it is God's reign itself, a reign which is shared with those who surrender themselves to it.

Revelation 1:6 is to be interpreted in this sense. The Church is both a priesthood and a kingdom. The redeemed share the prerogative of their Great High Priest of entering into the very Holy of Holies and worshipping God. They are priests. The Church also shares the prerogative of their Lord and King. They are granted the right to rule with Christ. They are a kingdom, a nation of kings.

The Church therefore is not the Kingdom of God; God's Kingdom creates the Church and works in the world through the Church. Men cannot therefore build the Kingdom of God, but they can preach it and proclaim it; they can receive it or they can reject it." (The Gospel of the Kingdom, G. Eldon Ladd, pages 116-117)

The Kingdom of God is at the same time the Kingdom of Christ (Eph. 5:5); for the Kingdom of God, the redemptive reign of God, is manifested among men through the person of Christ, and it is Christ who must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet (I Cor. 15:25). Indeed, if any distinction is to be made between the Kingdom of God and of Christ, we must say that the Kingdom of Christ includes the period from His coming in the flesh until the end of His millennial reign 'when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father' (I Cor. 15:24).

The Kingdom of God, as the redemptive activity and rule of God in Christ, created the Church and works through the Church in the world. As the disciples of the Lord went throughout the villages of Palestine, they proclaimed that in their mission, the Kingdom of God had come near to these villages (Luke 10:9). They performed the signs of the Kingdom, healing the sick and casting out demons, thus delivering men from the satanic power (vv. 9, 17) ... (verse 11 cited). Thus the Kingdom of God was at work among men not only in the person of our Lord but also through His disciples as they brought the word and the signs of the Kingdom to the

cities of Galilee.

In this way, the Kingdom of God, the redemptive activity and power of God, is working in the world today through the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is the fellowship of disciples of Jesus who have received the life of the Kingdom and are dedicated to the task of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom in the world. (The Gospel of the Kingdom, G. Eldon Ladd, pages 115-116)

Jesus offered the Kingdom to Israel. ... He sent his disciples... to 'go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 10:6). ... (Matt 15:24) ... (Matt 8:12)... When Israel rejected the Kingdom, the blessings which should have been theirs were given to those who would accept them.

This is seen in the sequence of verses in Matthew 11. The age of the law and the prophets ended with John the Baptist; since then the Kingdom of heaven has been at work among men. ... Verse 13 clearly states that the 'prophets and the law prophesied until John'; and verse 12 says, 'From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been coming violently, and men of violence take it by force.' (The Gospel of the Kingdom, G. Eldon Ladd, pages 107-108)

The Kingdom of God. ... is God's reign redemptively at work among men. (The Gospel of the Kingdom, G. Eldon Ladd, page 108)

The Jews wanted a political king to overthrow their enemies; but Jesus refused an earthly crown (John 6:15), offering spiritual bread instead of an earthly kingdom (John 6:52-57). Jesus addressed himself to the individual; and the terms of the new relationship were exclusively those of personal decision and faith. ... (Matt 3:7-10). The spiritual blessings of the new era were to be bestowed on an individual rather than on a family basis. (The Gospel of the Kingdom, G. Eldon Ladd, page 109)

The Kingdom of God is here; but instead of destroying human sovereignty, it has attacked the sovereignty of Satan. The Kingdom of God is here; but instead of making changes in the external, political order of things, it is making changes in the spiritual order and in the lives of men and women.

This is the mystery of the Kingdom, the truth which God now discloses for the first time in redemptive history. God's Kingdom is to work among men in two different stages. The Kingdom is yet to come in the form prophesied by Daniel. ... The world will yet behold the coming of God's Kingdom with power. But the mystery, the new revelation, is that this very Kingdom of God has now come to work among men but in an utterly unexpected way. It is not now destroying human rule; it is not now abolishing sin from the earth; it is not now bringing the baptism of fire that John announced. It has come quietly, unobtrusively, secretly. It can work among men and never be recognized by the crowds. In the spiritual realm, the Kingdom now offers to men the blessings of God's rule, delivering them from the power of Satan and sin. The Kingdom of God is an offer, a gift which may be accepted or rejected. The Kingdom is now here with persuasion rather than with power.

Each of the parables in Matthew 13 illustrates this mystery of the Kingdom, that the Kingdom of God which is yet to come in power and great glory is actually present among men in advance in an unexpected form to bring men in the present evil Age the blessings of The Age to Come.

The first parable of Matthew 13 is that of the four kinds of soil. ... The mystery of the Kingdom is this: The Kingdom of God is here but not with irresistible power. The Kingdom of God has come, but it is not like a stone grinding an image to powder. It is not now destroying wickedness. On the contrary, it is like a man sowing seed. It does not force itself upon men. ... This is the mystery of the Kingdom: that the Kingdom of God has come among men and yet men can reject it.

The parable of the tares or weeds illustrates another facet of this same truth. ... The separation

would take place (but) until harvest time, weeds and wheat must grow together.

It is of utmost importance to note that 'the field is the world' (v. 38). Where do we get the notion that the field is the Church? ... Our Lord said no such thing. He was not talking about the mixed character of the Church but about the world.

What is the point of this parable? In the book of Daniel when God's Kingdom comes, it will destroy sinners and sweep all wickedness from the face of the earth. In this parable, Jesus says that the Kingdom of God has already come and is already at work in the world; but it is not destroying sin, it is not purging the earth of evil. The Kingdom of God is indeed here but in a different way from that which was anticipated.

The unforeseen character of the coming of the Kingdom among men is further illustrated in the third and fourth parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. In ancient Semitic idiom, the mustard seed was a proverbial symbol for that which was tiny and insignificant. ... Even though it is like a tiny seed, it is still the Kingdom of God. ... Growth is not the truth in this parable. It has nothing to teach us about how the Kingdom will come in the future. We know from other Scriptures that the Kingdom of God will come in mighty power. ... One truth is set forth: the Kingdom of God which one day shall fill the earth is here among men but in a form which was never before expected. It is like an insignificant seed of mustard. This tiny thing is, however, God's Kingdom and is therefore not to be despised.

The parable of the leaven illustrates the same truth. ... The dough swallows up the leaven so that one is hardly aware of its presence. It is almost unobservable; it can scarcely be seen. Instead of the glory of God shaking the earth, the Kingdom has come in One who is meek and lowly, who is destined to be put to death, who has only a few disciples

The parables of the treasure and the costly pearl (Matt. 13:44-46) logically follow those of the mustard seed and the leaven. The Kingdom of God is like a tiny seed of mustard, a tiny bit of leaven; but even though its form is insignificant, it is the Kingdom of God. Therefore it is of inestimable value. ... The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure whose value transcends every other possession; it is like a pearl whose acquisition merits the loss of all other goods.

It is now like a drag-net which gathers within its influence men of various sorts, both good and bad. The separation between the good and the bad is not yet; the day of judgment belongs to the end of the age (Matt. 13:49). Meanwhile, there will be within the circle of those who are caught up by the activity of God's Kingdom in the world not only those who are truly sons of the Kingdom; evil men will also be found in this movement.

The parable of the wheat and the weeds describes the character of the world at large; the good and the evil are to live side by side until the day of judgment. ... The parable of the drag-net has a narrower reference and describes the circle of men who are influenced by the activity of God's Kingdom in the person of Christ. Evil men will find their way into that fellowship. This explains how there could be a Judas in the immediate circle of our Lord's disciples.

We should include in this study of the mystery of the Kingdom an important parable found only in the Gospel of Mark. . . (Mark 4:26-29).

The parable of the seed growing by itself sets forth a single basic truth: 'the earth beareth fruit of itself.' ... The Kingdom of God is like a seed in this one point: a seed contains the principle of life within itself. There is nothing the farmer can add to the life in the seed. He cannot make it grow, he cannot cause it to produce life. His one task is to sow the seed. ...

The Kingdom of God is a miracle. It is the act of God. It is supernatural. Men cannot build the Kingdom, they cannot erect it. The Kingdom is the Kingdom of God; it is God's reign, God's rule. God has entrusted the Gospel of the Kingdom to men. ... but the actual working of the Kingdom is God's working. The fruitage is produced not by human effort or skill but by the life of the Kingdom itself. It is God's deed.

This is the mystery of the Kingdom: Before the day of the harvest, before the end of the age,

God has entered into history in the person of Christ to work among men. ... It comes humbly, unobtrusively. It comes to men as a Galilean carpenter went throughout the cities of Palestine preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, delivering men from their bondage to the Devil. ... It comes quietly, humbly, without fire from heaven, without a blaze of glory, without a rending of the mountains or a cleaving of the skies. It comes like seed sown in the earth. It can be rejected by hard hearts, it can be choked out, its life may sometimes seem to wither and die. But it is the Kingdom of God. It brings the divine miracle of divine life among men. It introduces them into blessings of the divine rule. It is to them the supernatural work of God's grace. And this same Kingdom, this same supernatural power of God will yet manifest itself at the end of the age, this time not quietly within the lives of those who receive it, but in power and great glory purging all sin and evil from the earth. Such is the Gospel of the Kingdom. (The Gospel of the Kingdom, G. Eldon Ladd, pages 55-65)

'Church' and 'kingdom' do not coalesce anywhere in the synoptic gospels. (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 505)

In these parables Jesus enters further into the modality of the coming of the kingdom of God. (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 123)

The fulfillment is there, and yet the kingdom is still to come. The kingdom has come, and yet the fulfillment is in abeyance. Keeping this unity in view is one of the fundamental presuppositions for the understanding of the gospel. (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 106)

The parables indicate the special veiled way in which the kingdom has come. . . . The kingdom has come, the Messiah has been revealed; but this can only be discerned by faith, that is to say, by the grace of God. This will one day be changed.

The parable of the sower has priority over the others. ... In many respects it is the starting-point. ... The parable is actually about the mystery of the kingdom. ... This is the way of the kingdom: 'A sower went out to sow -- and nothing further; and this means the new world of God.' ... In the basic instruction of this parable Jesus gives a very fundamental insight into the kingdom that has begun with his coming. ... The disciples are enlightened about the presence of the kingdom. But this presence is not to be sought in the harvest, but in the sowing of the seed. It is not the parable of the harvester but of the sower. (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, pages 127-133)

It was rather the common supposition shared by both the disciples and the multitude, viz., that the kingdom of God meant harvest, judgment, end. What Jesus wanted to teach the disciples was the relationship between what they had accepted in faith as the 'mystery of the kingdom' (viz., that Jesus Christ and the kingdom had come) and the delay of the end, the harvest, the consummation. (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 133-134)

The concept *basileia* nowhere occurs in the sense of this idea of the *ekklesia*. Nor is it used in the sense that the kingdom of God in its provisional manifestation on earth would be embodied in the form and organization of the church." (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 343)

By the term kingdom of God we can denote not only the fulfilling and completing action of God in relation to the entire cosmos, but also various facets of this all-embracing process. (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 343)

'Being in the kingdom' means the participation in the fulfillment of salvation that began with Christ's coming. (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 344)

Until now we have translated *basileia* as kingdom, but in Greek it may mean both kingship, kingly dominion, and kingdom. There is no doubt that the former sense, especially that of dominion as the exercise of royal dignity, is the most prominent usage of the word in the various pronouncements about the 'kingdom of heaven' in the gospels. The spatial meaning of kingdom is then a secondary one. When the text says that the *basileia toon ouranoon* 'is at

hand'; 'is nigh at hand'; 'cometh' or 'is coming'; 'should appear,' or 'may come,' we should not in the first place think of a spatial or a static entity, which is descending from heaven; but rather of the divine kingly rule actually and effectively starting its operation; therefore we should think of the Divine action of the king. ...

There is a Personal connotation in the expression 'the kingdom of heaven.' The manifestation of the kingdom cannot be conceived as an impersonal metaphysical event, but as the coming of God himself as king. This conception is borne out by a series of parables about the kingdom of God. A definite person always stands in the center in these parables, and his action demonstrates the meaning of the kingdom. This person is often no other than God or the Son acting in his name and according to his instruction. (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, pages 24-25)

'Kingdom of God' and 'the Son of Man' are correlates in Jesus' preaching The 'coming of the Son of Man' (Matt. 10:23) is synonymous with the 'coming of the kingdom of God,' as appears from a comparison of Matthew 16:18 and Mark 9:1 (etc) ... The correlation between the concepts 'kingdom of heaven' and 'Son of Man' is especially important for the definition of the general character of the kingdom of heaven (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 31)

Jesus did not exclusively base his message on Daniel's vision but on the whole of the Old Testament Word of God. (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 34)

In contrast to (Matt. 24:26; cf. Luke 17:23), Jesus makes the *Parousia* of the Son of Man 'like lightning out of one part of heaven unto the other part.'" (The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman Ridderbos, page 35)