

**Kingdom Of God** or of Heaven  
(ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ or τῶν οὐρανῶν).

In the New Testament the phrases "kingdom of God" (Mat 6:33; Mar 1:14-15; Luk 4:43; Luk 6:20; Joh 3:3; Joh 3:5), "kingdom of Christ" (Mat 13:41; Mat 20:21; Rev 1:9), "kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph 5:5), "kingdom of David," i.e. as the ancestor and type of the Messiah (Mar 11:10), "the kingdom" (Mat 8:12; Mat 13:19), and "kingdom of heaven" (Mat 3:2; Mat 4:17; Mat 13:41; 2Ti 4:18), are all synonymous, and signify *the divine spiritual kingdom, the glorious reign of the Messiah*. The idea of this kingdom has its basis in the prophecies of the Old Testament, where the coming of the Messiah and his triumphs are foretold (Psa 2:6-12; Psa 101:1-7; Isa 2:1-4; Mic 4:1; Isa 11:1-10; Jer 23:5-6; Jer 31:31-34; Jer 32:37-44; Jer 33:14-18; Eze 34:23-31; Eze 37:24-28; Dan 2:44; Dan 7:14; Dan 7:27; Dan 9:25; Dan 9:27). In these passages the reign of the Messiah is figuratively described as a golden age, when the true religion, and with it the *Jewish theocracy*, should be re-established in more than pristine purity, and universal peace and happiness prevail. All this was doubtless to be understood in a spiritual sense; and so the devout Jews of our Saviour's time appear to have understood it, as Zacharias, Simeon, Anna, and Joseph (Luk 1:67-79; Luk 2:25-30; Luk 23:50-51). But the Jews at large gave to these prophecies a temporal meaning, and expected a Messiah who should come in the clouds of heaven, and, as king of the Jewish nation, restore the ancient religion and worship, reform the corrupt morals of the people, make expiation<sup>i</sup> for their sins, free them from the yoke of foreign dominion, and at length reign over the whole earth in peace and glory (Mat 5:19; Mat 8:12; Mat 18:1; Mat 20:21; Luk 17:20; Luk 19:11; Act 1:6). This Jewish temporal sense appears to have been also held by the apostles before the day of Pentecost.

It has been well observed by Knobel, in his work *On the Prophets*, that "Jesus did not acknowledge himself called upon to fulfil those theocratic announcements which had an earthly political character, in the sense in which they were uttered; for his plan was spiritual and universal, neither including worldly interests, nor contracted within national and political limits. He gave, accordingly, to all such announcements a higher and more general meaning, so as to realize them in accordance with such a scheme. Thus,

1. The prophets had announced that Jehovah would deliver his people from the political calamities into which, through the conquering might of their foes, they had been brought. This Jesus fulfilled, but in a higher sense. He beheld the Jewish and heathen world under the thralldom<sup>ii</sup> of error and of sin, in circumstances of moral calamity,

and he regarded himself as sent to affect its deliverance. In this sense he announced himself as the Redeemer, who had come to save the world, to destroy the works of the devil, to annihilate the powers of evil, and to bring men from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light'

2. The prophets had predicted that Jehovah would again be united to his restored people, would dwell among them, and no more give up the theocratic relation. This also Jesus fulfilled in a higher sense. He found mankind in a state of estrangement from God, arising from their lying in sin, and he viewed it as his vocation to bring them back to God. He reconciled men to God gave them access to God, and united them to him as his dear children, and made his people one with God as he himself is one,
3. The prophets had declared that Jehovah would make his people, thus redeemed and reunited to him, supremely blessed in the enjoyment of all earthly pleasures. To communicate such blessings in the literal acceptance of the words was no part of the work of Jesus; on the contrary, he often tells his followers that they must lay their account with much suffering. The blessings which he offers are of a spiritual kind, consisting in internal and unending fellowship with God. This is the *life*, the *life eternal*. In the passages where he seems to speak of temporal blessings (e.g. [Mat 8:11](#); [Mat 19:27](#), etc.) he either speaks metaphorically or in reference to the ideas of those whom he addressed, and who were not quite emancipated from carnal hopes,
4. The prophets had predicted, in general, the re-establishment of their people into a mighty state, which should endure upon the earth in imperishable splendor as an outward community. This prospect Jesus realized again in a higher and a spiritual sense by establishing a religious invisible community, internally united by oneness of faith in God and of pure desire, which ever grows and reaches its perfection only in another life. The rise and progress of this man cannot observe, for its existence is in the invisible life of the spirit ([Luk 17:20](#)), yet the opposition of the wicked is an evidence of its approach ([Mat 12:28](#)). It has no political designs, for it 'is not of this world;' and there are found in it no such gradations of rank as in earthly political communities ([Mat 20:25](#)). What is external is not essential to it; its prime element is mind, pious, devoted to God, and pleasing God. Hence the kingdom of Jesus is composed of those who turn to God and his ambassadors. and in faith and life abide true to them.

From this it is clear how sometimes this kingdom maybe spoken of as present, and sometimes as future. Religious and moral truth works forever, and draws under its influence one after another, until at length it shall reign over all. In designating this community, Jesus made use of terms having a relation to the ancient theocracy; it is the *kingdom of God* or *of heaven*, though, at the same time, it is represented rather as *the family* than as the *state* of God. This appears from many other phrases. The head of the ancient community was called *Lord* and *King*; that of the new is called *Father*; the members of the former were *servants*, i.e. *subjects of Jd'hovah*; those of the latter are *sons of God*; the feeling of the former towards God is described as the *fear of Jehovah*; that of the latter is *believing confidence* or *love*; the chief duty of the former was *righteousness*; the first duty of the latter is *love*. All these expressions are adapted to the constitution of the sacred community, either as *a divine state* or as a *divine family*. It needs hardly to be mentioned that Jesus extended its fulfilment of these ancient prophecies in this spiritual sense to all men." Referring to the Old-Testament idea, we may therefore regard the "kingdom of heaven," etc., in the New Testament, as designating, in its Christian sense, the *Christian dispensation*, or the community of those who receive Jesus as the Messiah, and who, united by his Spirit under him as their Head, rejoice in the truth, and live a holy life in love and in communion with him (Mat 3:2; Mat 4:17; Mat 4:23; Mat 9:35; Mat 10:7; Mar 1:14-15; Luk 10:9; Luk 10:11; Luk 23:51; Act 27:31').

This spiritual kingdom has both an *internal* and *external* form. As internal and spiritual, it already exists and rules in the hearts of all Christians, and is therefore present (Rom 14:17; Mat 6:33; Mar 10:15; Luk 17:21; Luk 18:17; Joh 3:3; Joh 3:5; 1Co 4:20). It "suffereth violence," implying the eagerness with which the Gospel was received in the agitated state of men's minds (Mat 11:12; Luk 16:6). As external, it is either embodied in the visible Church of Christ, and in so far is present and progressive (Mat 6:10; Mat 12:28; Mat 13:24; Mat 13:31; Mat 13:33; Mat 13:41; Mat 13:47; Mat 16:19; Mat 16:28; Mar 4:30; Mar 11:10; Luk 13:18; Luk 13:20; Act 19:8; Heb 12:28), or it is to be perfected in the coming of the Messiah to judgment and his subsequent spiritual reign in bliss and glory, in which view it is future (Mat 13:43; Mat 26:29; Mar 14:25; Luk 22:29-30; 2Pe 1:11; Rev 12:10). In this latter view it denotes especially *the bliss of heaven*, *eternal life*, which is to be enjoyed in the Redeemer's kingdom (Mat 8:11; Mat 25:34; Mar 9:47; Luk 13:18; Luk 13:29; Act 11:22; 1Co 6:9; 1Co 6:20; 1Co 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; 2Th 1:5; 2Ti 4:18; Jas 2:5). But these different aspects are not always distinguished, the expression often embracing both the internal and external sense, and referring both to its commencement in this world and its completion in the world to come (Mat

5:3; Mat 5:10; Mat 5:20; Mat 7:21; Mat 11:11; Mat 13:11; Mat 13:52; Mat 18:3-4; Col 1:13; 1Th 2:12). In Luke i, 33, it is said of the kingdom of Christ "there shall be no end;" whereas in 1Co 15:24-26, it is said " he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father." The contradiction is only in appearance. The latter passage refers to the *mediatorial* dominion of Christ; and when the mediatorial work of the Saviour is accomplished, then, at the final judgment, he will resign forever his mediatorial office, while the reign of Christ as God supreme will never cease. "His throne," in the empire of the universe, "is forever and ever" (Heb 1:8). "There is reason to believe not only that the expression *kingdom of heaven*, as used in the New Test., was employed as synonymous with *kingdom of God*, as referred to in the Old Test., but that the former expression had become common among the Jews of our Lord's time for denoting the state of things expected to be brought in by the Messiah.

The mere use of the expression as it first occurs in Matthew, uttered apparently by John Baptist, and our Lord himself, without a note of explanation, as if all perfectly understood what was meant by it, seems alone conclusive evidence of this. The Old-Testament constitution, and the writings belonging to it, had familiarized the Jews with the application of the terms *king* and *kingdom* to God, not merely with reference to his universal sovereignty, but also to his special connection with the people he had chosen for himself (1Sa 12:12; Psa 2:6; Psa 5:2; Psa 20:9; 1Ch 29:11; 2Ch 13:8, etc.). In Daniel, however, where pointed expression required to be given to the difference in this respect between what is of earth and what is of heaven, we find matters ordered on a certain occasion with a view to bring out the specific lesson that 'the heavens do rule' (Dan 4:26); and in the interpretation given to the vision, which had been granted to Nebuchadnezzar, it was said, with more special reference to New Testament times, that 'in the days of those (earthly) kings the God of heaven (lit. of the heavens) should set up a kingdom that should never be destroyed (Dan 2:44). In still another vision granted to Daniel himself, this divine kingdom was represented under the image of one like a Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him' (Dan 7:13-14). It appears to have been in consequence of the phraseology thus introduced and sanctioned by Daniel that the expression 'kingdom of heaven' (מְלֻכּוּת הַשָּׁמַיִם, *malkuth hashamayim*) passed into common usage among the Jews, and was but another name with them for a state of fellowship with God and devotedness to his service. Many examples of this are given by Wetstein on Mat 3:2 from Jewish writings: thus, 'He who confesses God to be one, and repeats Deu 6:4, takes up the kingdom of heaven;' 'Jacob called his sons and commanded them

concerning the ways of God, and they took upon them the kingdom of heaven;' 'The sons of Ahasius did not take upon them the yoke of the kingdom of heaven; they did not acknowledge the Lord, for they said, There is not a kingdom in heaven,' etc. The expression, indeed, does not seem to have been used specifically with reference to the Messiah's coming, or the state to be introduced by him (for the examples produced by Schottgen [*De Messia*, ch. ii] are scarcely in point); but when the Lord himself was declared to be at hand to remodel everything, and visibly take the government, as it were, on his shoulder, it would be understood of itself that here the kingdom of heaven should be found concentrating itself, and that to join one's self to Messiah would be in the truest sense to take up the yoke of that kingdom. *SEE KINGLY OFFICE OF CHRIST.*

The scriptural and popular usages of the term "kingdom of God," kingdom of heaven," etc., serve as a ~~ew~~ (clue) to the otherwise rather abrupt proclamation of the Baptist and Jesus at the very beginning of their public ministrations. It is true that in the Old Testament the kingdom or reign of God usually signifies his infinite power, or, more properly, his sovereign authority over all creatures, kingdoms, and hearts. *SEE KING.* Thus Wisdom says ([Wis 10:10](#)), God showed his kingdom to Jacob, i.e. he opened the kingdom of heaven to him in showing him the mysterious ladder by which the angels ascended and descended; and Ecclesiasticus (47:13) says, God gave to David the covenant assurance, or promise of the kingdom, for himself and his successors. Still the transition from this to the moral and religious sphere was so natural that it was silently and continually made, especially as Jehovah was perpetually represented as the supreme and sole legitimate sovereign of his people. Indeed, the theocracy was the central idea of the Jewish state, *SEE JUDGE*, and hence the first announcements of the Gospel sounded with thrilling effect upon the ears of the people, proverbially impatient of foreign rule, and yet, at the time, apparently bound in a hopeless vassalage to Rome. It was to the populace like a trumpet-call to a war for independence, or rather like one of the old paeans of deliverance sung by Miriam and Deborah. *SEE THEOCRACY.*

Copious lists of monographs<sup>iii</sup> on this subject may be seen in Danz, *Woirterbuch*, s.v. Himmel-Reich, Messias Reich; Volbeding, *Index Programmatum*, p. 37; Hase, *Leben Jesu*, p. 72, 77. *SEE MESSIAH.*

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<sup>i</sup> **Expiation** - the act of making amends or reparation for guilt or wrongdoing; atonement.

<sup>ii</sup> **Thralldom** - the state of being a [thrall](#); bondage; slavery; servitude.

<sup>iii</sup> **Monograph** - a highly detailed and thoroughly documented study or paper written about a limited area of a subject or field of inquiry: