

The Kingdom Rejected and Postponed

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

Lewis Sperry Chafer's sermon explores the rejection and postponement of the Kingdom of God and its implications for Israel and humanity.

Scripture: John 3:3

Topics: "Kingdom Of God", "Messianic Prophecy"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer delves into the distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, emphasizing that while they share common ground in divine authority, they differ in the extent of government implied. The kingdom of God is universal, encompassing all moral intelligence subject to God's will, while the kingdom of heaven is Messianic and has a more limited scope on earth. Chafer explores the rejection of the kingdom offer to Israel, the significance of Christ's sacrificial death, and the association of His earthly kingdom with His second coming.

Transcript

THE fact that the other Gospels present certain revelations as related to the kingdom of God which Matthew has related to the kingdom of heaven has been accepted by some as grounds for concluding that these terms are synonymous. There can be no question that there is much in common between whatever may be represented by these two terms, else they would not be used interchangeably. The common ground between them lies, it would seem, in the fact that both refer to a certain divine authority, or government. A study of the passages involved will reveal that there is a wide difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. This will be seen to be in the extent of government which is implied in each.

The term "kingdom of God," it will be found, is employed when there is nothing stated that would limit its authority over all the universe. The term "kingdom of heaven," it will also be found, is used when the divine government is considered as limited to the earth. There is an important difference, as well, in the possible moral character of each.

It is not said of the kingdom of God, as it is of the kingdom of heaven, that there are divine judgments required for wrongdoers within its bounds, or that the false wheat, or tares, and bad fish are a part of it. Entrance into the kingdom of heaven, in its Messianic form, may be by so low a standard as that which merely exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt. v. 20): while entrance into the kingdom of God is by a new birth alone (Jno. iii. 3). The kingdom of heaven is the divine government in the

earth which passes through changing phases until every foe has been conquered, and it is finally merged, perfected, into the all-inclusive kingdom of God (1 Cor. xv. 24-28). For this final consummation we plead when we pray: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Whatever within this divine government in the earth is consonant with the perfect character of the kingdom of God may be considered as a part of that kingdom; though some of its subjects, who are perfect in standing, may be quite imperfect in life and conduct.

The kingdom of heaven has been defined by Rev. C. I. Scofield, D. D., in the Scofield Reference Bible thus:

(1) "The phrase, kingdom of heaven (lit, of the heavens), is peculiar to Matthew and signifies the Messianic earth rule of Jesus Christ, the Son of David. It is called the kingdom of heaven because it is the rule of the heavens over the earth (Mt. vi. 10). The phrase is derived from Daniel, where it is defined (Dan. ii. 34-36, 44; vii 23-27) as the kingdom which 'the God of heaven' will set up after the destruction by the 'stone cut out without hands' of the Gentile world-system. It is the kingdom covenanted to David's seed (2 Sam. vii. 7-10); described in the prophets (Zech. xii. 8, note); and confirmed to Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary, through the angel Gabriel (Lk. i. 32, 33).

(2) "The kingdom of heaven has three aspects in Matthew: (a) 'at hand' from the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist (Mt. iii. 2) to the virtual rejection of the King, and the announcement of the new brotherhood (Mt. xii. 46-50); (b) In seven 'mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,' to be fulfilled during the present age (Mt. xiii. 1-52), to which are to be added the parables of the kingdom of heaven which were spoken after those of Matthew xiii., and which have to do with the sphere of Christian profession during this age; (c) The prophetic aspect -- the kingdom to be set up after the return of the King in glory (Mt. xxiv. 29 - xxv. 46; Lk. xix. 12-19; Acts xv. 14-17)."

Scofield Reference Bible, page 996.

So, again:

"The kingdom of God is to be distinguished from the kingdom of heaven (Mt. iii. 2, note) in five respects:

(1) The kingdom of God is universal, including all moral intelligence willingly subject to the will of God, whether angels, the Church, or saints of past or future dispensations (Lk. xiii. 28, 29; Heb. xii. 22, 23); while the kingdom of heaven is Messianic, Mediatorial, Davidic, and has for its object the establishment of the kingdom of God in the earth (Mt. iii. 2, note; 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25).

(2) The kingdom of God is entered only by the new birth (Jno. iii. 3, 5-7); the kingdom of heaven, during this age, is the sphere of a profession which may be real or false (Mt. xiii. 3, note; xxv. 1, 11, 12).

(3) Since the kingdom of heaven is the earthly sphere of the universal kingdom of God, the two have almost all things in common. For this reason many parables and other teachings are spoken of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew, and of the kingdom of God in Mark and Luke. It is the omissions which are significant. The parables of the wheat and tares, and of the net (Mt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43, 47-50) are not spoken of the kingdom of God. In that kingdom there are neither tares nor bad fish. But the parable of the leaven (Mt. xiii. 33) is spoken of the kingdom of God also, for, alas, even the true doctrines of the kingdom are leavened with the errors of which the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians were the representatives. (See Mt. xiii. 33, note.)

(4) The kingdom of God 'comes not with outward show' (Lk. xvii. 20), but is chiefly that which is inward and spiritual (Rom. xiv. 17); while the kingdom of heaven is organic, and is to be manifested in glory on the earth...

(5) The kingdom of heaven merges into the kingdom of God when Christ, having 'put all enemies under His feet,' 'shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father' (1 Cor. xv. 24-28)."

Ibid., page 1003.

The various uses of the term "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew's Gospel represent the progressive stages through which the government of God in the earth must pass in arriving at the determined end. The first use of the term is in connection with the offer of a kingdom to Israel which had been covenanted to David and described by the prophets of the Old Testament and that which forms the hope of Israel to this hour. This offer of the kingdom which was extended through Christ, John, and the disciples to the nation was rejected by that nation, notwithstanding the fact that it was in complete fulfillment of every divinely given prediction. It was a bona fide offer and, had they received Him as their King, the nation's hope would have been realized. However, it was in the perfect councils and foreknowledge of God that the offer would be rejected, and thereby the way was made for the realization of the great unrevealed purpose of God, which was to be accomplished before the final manifestation of the kingdom in the earth.

This first offer of the kingdom had been typified by the events at Kadesh-Barnea. There this same nation, which had already tasted the discomforts of the desert, were given an opportunity to immediately enter their promised land. Thus left to choose, they failed to enter, and returned to forty years more of wilderness wandering and added judgments. They might have entered the land in blessing. God knew they would not; still it was through their own choice that the blessing was postponed.

Later they were brought again to the land after their judgments and afflictions in the wilderness. This time, however, it was without reference to their own choice. With the high hand of Jehovah God they were placed in their own land. So Israel, already five hundred years out of the land, and without a king, rejected the King and the kingdom as offered in Christ, and still continues the wilderness afflictions among all the nations of the earth whither the Lord God hath driven them.

But He will yet regather them, else the oath of Jehovah will fail, and that regathering will be without reference to their own choosing, or merit. Under an unconditional covenant He has pledged to place them in kingdom blessings, under the glorious reign of their Immanuel King and in their own land (Deut. xxx. 3-5; Isa. xi. 10-13; Jer. xxiii. 3-8; Ezek. xxxvii. 21-25). This, too, shall be done by no human processes, but by the mighty power of God.

The first evidence of Israel's rejection of her kingdom as offered by her King is seen in the record that John the Baptist had been placed in prison (Mt. xi. 2). What could the imprisonment of the forerunner mean other than a step toward the rejection of the King? Immediately the King utters His first words of judgment and doom:

"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which

have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Mt. xi. 20-24).

Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum were the cities in which He had given greatest proof of His Messiahship and they were therefore most guilty in His rejection.

In connection with this first evidence of rejection there is introduced a note wholly foreign to the kingdom theme, and with great significance:

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. xi. 28, 29).

Everything is in contrast: this is not an offer of a kingdom to a nation, but of soul rest to the individual who will come to Him. A rest which results from coming to know the Father through the Son (Mt. xi. 27), whom to know aright is eternal life (Jno. xvii. 3). The reality contained in this offer could only be realized by His cross. Christ was evidently associating, even then, His rejection with His cross. It was as though He was comforting His own heart with a moment's reflection upon the "joy that was set before him" for which He would "endure the cross and despise the shame." Who shall measure the joy of His heart in bringing rest to one sin-sick soul (Isa. liii. 11)? This flash-light on the coming redemption by His cross immediately passes and the King continues to present Himself to the nation as their King. He proves again by the mighty works of the following chapter that He is none other than their long looked for Messiah; yet in the midst of these infallible proofs it is recorded: "And the Pharisees went out and held a council how they might destroy him" (Mt. xii. 14). The death of John the Baptist (Mt. xiv. 1-13) is also followed by a rebuke to the Pharisees and by words of judgment upon them (Mt. xv. 1-20).

Another glance forward toward His cross is recorded in connection with His evident rejection in Mt. xvi. 13-18:

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The rejection is seen in the report of the disciples that Christ was accounted for by the men of the nation to whom He had come as being John the Baptist, Elias, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

How impressed they were with His Personality and power! Yet how preposterous that He should be confused with John with whom He had so recently stood among them! They were evidently willing to account for Him by any subterfuge that would relieve them of the acknowledgment of Him as their King. In connection with this new evidence of rejection He again reflects upon the joy that was to be His through His cross: "On this rock I will build my church." The church, His precious bride, which He loved and for which He gave Himself; "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 25-27). This, again, is the joy that was set before Him and which would be realized only by His rejection and sacrificial death.

Continuing the narrative of the Gospel of the King to its end, He is seen still offering Himself to the nation as their King, riding meek and lowly into Jerusalem that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, and dying under the fatal and final claim to be the "King of the Jews." Along with this is the record of the ever increasing animosity and rejection of the nation, leading up to the climacteric expression of their hatred, the crucifixion of their King between two thieves. Thus the supreme wickedness of man descended to its lowest depths of sin against God; yet by this death the flood-gates of life were opened and the very sin of His crucifixion was laid back upon His own breast, as He met all the doom that must fall upon "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

When the nation began to reject her King, He not only began to anticipate His sacrificial death and the blessings to flow out of it, but He began, also, to speak of returning to this earth again, and to associate the realization of His earthly kingdom with that event. That the kingdom was to be realized through a return of the divine Person was certainly in the foreknowledge of God and was foretold by prophets (Deut. xxx. 3; Dan. vii. 13, 14).

However, in the main, the prophets did not distinguish the fulfilling of the Lamb, or sacrificial type, in the first advent from the fulfilling of the Lion, or kingly type, in the second advent. On the other hand, by the Spirit, who inspired them, they never confused these great issues, although the time relations that were to exist between these two vastly different ministries of Christ were not revealed to them. Of this Peter writes in 1 Peter i. 10, 11 thus:

"Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

The unsolved problem was the time intervening between the sufferings of Christ in connection with His first coming, and His manifestation in glory when He should come the second time.

To conclude that these literal earthly blessings for Israel were transferred into spiritual blessings for all nations because Israel rejected and crucified her King at His first appearing, compels one to ignore the bulk of Old Testament prophecies and the plain promises and teachings of Jesus. The oath of Jehovah still stands, and He knows no defeat. His plan has not been changed. To speak of the kingdom as postponed is to consider it within the perspective of Israel's final glory. If the oath, covenant and promises of Jehovah cannot be trusted, what assurance can be drawn from any word He has spoken? Purposing to instruct us as to a yet future earthly kingdom for Israel, and for the nations through them, what more positive, or meaningful, language could He have employed?

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/lewis-sperry-chafer/the-kingdom-rejected-and-postponed/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net