

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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KINGDOM TRUTH

The descriptive phrase, "the kingdom of God," has suffered many things at the hands of its interpreters. Today, it is grossly misunderstood throughout Christendom. It has been taken and applied to many things and used in ways that are contrary to all that the Bible teaches. It is so commonly used in religious circles that there is a widespread illusion that its meaning is well understood. This is contrary to the facts in the case, for it is quite evident that the average Christian does not know what it means when he hears it or what idea it conveys when he uses it. This Biblical phrase has become part of the ritualistic language of Christendom. Men talk of "building the kingdom of God," ignoring altogether that God alone can build His kingdom. Certain dispensationalists say, "the kingdom of God is Jewish," in woeful ignorance of the fact that if this were true it would be "the kingdom of the Jews," or "the kingdom of Israel," not the kingdom of God. There are built-in safeguards in this phrase against all such errors; but, alas, they go unheeded.

Furthermore, there is in this phrase a definite safeguard against the common error of defining the word *kingdom* as signifying "a realm ruled over by a king." This definition will not fit into this phrase, and if it is accepted it will draw a veil over every occurrence of this phrase in the New Testament. It is a usage based on accommodation, and fastened onto the Greek word *basileia*. This is the same as taking the modern meaning of the word *libertine* and fastening it onto the occurrence in Acts 6:9. Everyone who seeks to understand the Word of God should pause and ask himself the question, "How do I define the kingdom of God?"

My own definition of the kingdom of God is that I understand the Greek word *basileia* to mean government, although such synonymous terms as rule, sovereignty, jurisdiction, and reign may also be used to indicate certain shades of meaning when the context so indicates. Therefore, in its basic, fundamental meaning "the kingdom of God" is the government of God. However, in the New Testament this term is repeatedly used to designate a certain future time period, that is, absolute divine government in a definite period of time. In that day the words "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" will be used only to refer to a condition that existed in the past. In the kingdom of God the government will be of God, by God, and for His glory. As Dr. George E. Ladd rightly says: "The day is surely coming when God will take the reins of government into His hands and the kingdom of God will come on earth and His will be done even as it is in heaven" (The Blessed Hope, page 6).

In medieval times it was customary to look upon organized religion, the visible ecclesiastical system, as being "the church," and then insist that the church was the kingdom of God. This is a concept still held by many, but it is one that cannot be equated with the truth revealed in the New Testament.

In the nineteenth century many Christians became deeply disturbed about the kind of a world in which they lived and were anxious to make it a better one. In their desires they saw an ideal state of affairs among men toward which they felt "the church" should strive. They appropriated the Biblical term "the kingdom of God" to describe this ideal state of affairs and proclaimed that it was the sacred duty of "the church" to bring the kingdom of God upon the earth. Thus, they misappropriated this phrase to give credence to and dignify their programs for social progress, employing it constantly in a manner that was foreign to the New Testament.

This error spread like a brush fire. The use of this term in this manner was taken up and widely developed by leading theologians in Europe and America until the idea of the church bringing in the kingdom of God became the popular religious idea of the day.

Thus, at the turn of the century many Christian leaders were turning their attention to the social ills that plagued mankind. They were convinced that the principal task of organized religion was to rectify all that was wrong in the social order. "To create a civilization that is Christian in spirit and passion throughout the earth," were the glowing words used to describe this

goal by one interchurch movement. A new gospel called "the social gospel" became the vogue of the day. This "gospel" was concerned with the betterment of mankind. In almost every theological seminary in the U.S.A. it displaced that gospel which had always been concerned with the salvation of the individual.

In the social gospel the idea of a "united church" bringing justice, righteousness, equity and peace upon the earth was given the paramount place. And the phrase commonly used to describe this goal was "bringing the kingdom of God upon the earth:" "Building the kingdom of God," "extending the kingdom of God," and "advancing the kingdom of God" were the popular phrases used to describe every effort and program of this time. They were used when a new church was organized, a church building was dedicated, a mission field opened, a church school was founded or enlarged, a minister was ordained, or even when a baby was baptized. All these accomplishments were looked upon as being facets of building, extending, advancing, or increasing the kingdom of God. And the drive was always to get more men and get more money, for these were the two main things needed to build the kingdom of God on earth.

There is a demonstrable law related to the use of words which is parallel to Gresham's law in regard to money. (Gresham's law is simply that bad money drives out the good.) This law in regard to words is that the improper and false usage of a term will drive the proper and true use out of circulation. This is exactly what happened to the true meaning of the term "the kingdom of God." A meaning established by 74 occurrences of this phrase in the New Testament was debased by a false meaning and a deliberate misappropriation. The true Scriptural meaning and usage was almost driven from the minds of men and the term itself came into disrepute. In the great revival of Bible study and preaching that came in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, those who participated hesitated to use this term.

Reactions to this mass of error were bound to come, and they took place in the great resurgence of Bible study in the last quarter of the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth century. In this resurgence the "social gospel" was assailed and contradicted with many infallible proofs from the Word of God. It was demonstrated to be a perversion of the gospel of Christ and its programs foreign to the facts of God's revealed truth. And the great dispensational-premillennial movement came to the forefront to lead and to challenge in respect to a new and honest approach to the prophetic (eschatological) portions of God's Word.

History demonstrates that most reactions go too far. This was true of the reaction against the great mass of erroneous teaching which had usurped and falsely used the Biblical term "the kingdom of God." The idea of the dispensational premillennialists seemed to be stay away from the kingdom of God, let it alone. No real attempt was made to rescue it from the clutches of those who had misappropriated it to characterize their programs. The real truth concerning it was sorely neglected. It was made to be "the millennium," which it certainly is not. All attention was centered on "the signs of the times," "the rapture," "the tribulation," and "the second coming." And since the great prominence of the kingdom of God in Scripture could not be ignored, they gave it in insipid and generalized definition which robbed it of all value so far as being an expression of truth is concerned. It was defined as being the sovereignty of God, which is moral and universal, including all moral intelligences willingly subject to the will of God, whether angels or the saints of past and future dispensations. It was said to have existed from the beginning and will know no end, that it is over all and embraces all. This, in essence, is the definition given in both the *Scofield Reference Bible* and *The Companion Bible*.

This is what is known as a "Mother Hubbard definition," named after the dress of yesteryears. It covers everything and reveals nothing. The real weakness of it is that it will *not fit* into, neither will it shed any light upon any of the 74 occurrences of the term "the kingdom of God," in the New Testament. Is this what the Lord *Jesus* was proclaiming when He came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand"? Not in the least! I hesitate to be critical of both Dr. Scofield and Dr. Bullinger. However, if all their published writings are examined, it becomes plain that the assiduous study of the kingdom of God was simply *not* their cup of tea.

In my opinion the greatest weakness of the dispensational premillennialists has been their failure to include in their system of interpretation any sound and worthwhile teaching in regard to the kingdom of God. Their reaction in regard to all "kingdom *now*" and "kingdom is here" teaching, also against the false idea of men bringing in the kingdom by education, democratization, and culturization of the peoples of the earth, has been so strong that it has led to an almost complete failure to lay hold of the Biblical truth of the kingdom of God. All truth concerning the kingdom is

under suspicion in dispensational circles. This should *not* be, and as a dispensationalist for fifty-five years I intend to do my part to correct this situation.

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