

“The Kingdom of God”
The Bible Student 1:282-289, 328-335. [1900]

According to the united testimony of the synoptists, our Lord’s first message on His appearance in public was the nearness of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15; Matt. 4:17; Luke 4:19). The fourth Gospel insofar agrees with this, that it shows Jesus at the beginning of His ministry introducing the subject of the kingdom to Nicodemus (John 3:3). But, while in the synoptists the kingdom remains the central theme to which all the other elements in our Lord’s teaching are more or less distinctly related, in the Johannine discourses we hear no more of it after this one reference. Its place here is taken by other, more abstract ideas, preeminently that of life.

The first thing to be noticed in the synoptical passages above quoted is the absence of every attempt at a definition of what the kingdom of God means. Jesus occupies historic ground from the outset. It is the kingdom, the well-known kingdom, with which He presupposes familiarity, not merely on His own part but also on the part of His hearers. Our Lord did not come to found a new religion, but simply to usher in the fulfillment of something promised long beforehand. In the Old Testament God is frequently represented as the King of the universe not only, but also as the King of Israel in a special, redemptive sense. He became so at the time of the deliverance from Egypt and the organization of Israel on the basis of the covenant (Ex. 19:4-6; cf. Deut. 33:4, 5). In this sense God’s kingdom first meant a present, real relation between Himself and His people, not something whose realization was expected from the future. Through the supernatural giving of the law and its administration and His direction of the course of history Jehovah exercises the functions of King in Israel. Later on, however, the conception of the kingdom, without losing its older meaning, obtains a distinctly eschatological sense. This development coincided with the development of messianic prophecy, and both took place in dependence on the institution and further development of the human kingdom, especially that of the Davidic line. When the human king had been installed as the vice-gerent of God, it became apparent that in this representative form the perfect realization of the kingdom could not be a matter of the present, but would have to belong to the future. It is especially in the book of Daniel that this idea becomes prominent. The future kingdom is here described as the supernatural, universal, everlasting reign of the God of heaven which will overthrow and replace the great world monarchies.

In the Jewish literature which lies between the Old and the New Testament we also find the kingdom of God spoken of. It here again designates both the already existing reign of God over the world and Israel, and the future extension and enforcement of that reign in the messianic era. Here for the first time the phrase *ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* appears, the exact counterpart of which is not yet found in the Old Testament. It has been recently suggested that at the time of our Lord’s earthly life the phrase was not in common use to designate the sum of messianic expectations, other phrases such as “the coming aeon” being much more familiar, but this is hardly borne out by the Gospels themselves, which in Luke 17:20, Mark 15:43¹ introduce the phrase as popularly known. It is quite possible, however, that the very reasons for which our Lord made it the watchword of His gospel prevented its becoming a favorite with contemporary Judaism. For the Jews were not supremely interested in what the messianic age was to be from its highest, ideal, theocentric point of view, but rather in what it was to bring of material enjoyment to themselves, and the latter the name “kingdom of God” did not adequately express.

Our Lord never gives the name “kingdom of God” to the Old Testament theocracy, but always denotes by it the new form which God’s reign is to assume in the near or remote future. The law and the prophets are until John, from that time the kingdom of God is preached. In Matthew 8: 12, the Jews are called “sons of the kingdom,” not as actual possessors but as heirs of the same. And in the same sense Jesus declares that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to another nation (Matt. 21:43). He thus attaches Himself to the eschatological Old Testament usage. We here observe the same difference in point of view when in dogmatics we speak of the one covenant of grace in its two dispensations, whereas the Scripture is wont to speak of these as two distinct covenants, the old and the new.

Besides the phrase, “the kingdom of God,” which is found in all four Gospels (also in Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy) we meet with the phrase *ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν*, which is peculiar to Matthew. This phrase has been explained on the basis of the Jewish custom to use “heaven” as a substitute for the name of God, against pronouncing which scruples were entertained, and traces of which custom are found even in the New Testament. Compare Luke 15:21; 20:4. On this view the two phrases “the kingdom of God” and “the kingdom of heaven” would be entirely equivalent. The explanation is undoubtedly correct insofar as it finds in heaven a circumlocution for God. But it is not likely that the motive which led Jesus to put the one for the other was a desire to avoid the use of the divine name as such. Heaven stands for God not as a mere conventional substitute, but adds a new element to the conception expressed by the latter. Heaven is the center of all supernatural influence that is brought to bear upon the lower world. To say that a work is done by God leaves the mode of its accomplishment undetermined; to say that it is done from heaven is the strongest possible affirmation of its strictly supernatural origin. Heaven means God in a special mode of activity; compare Daniel 2:44, 7:13; Matthew 16:17, 18: 35; Romans 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:47; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 2. Heaven is also, as the abode of God, in relation to earth the ideal pattern to which all things here below ought to conform. In this sense to say that a thing is “of heaven” means not only that it is “of God” in general, but in that specific sense in which the heavenly realities agree with God’s nature (cf. Matt. 6:10). Finally, heaven is in the consciousness of Jesus the goal towards which every aspiration of the disciple in the kingdom ought to tend (cf. Matt. 6:19-21). It is no longer possible to determine the exact proportion in which the two phrases “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” were used by our Lord. It seems likely that Matthew most faithfully reflects the original preponderance of the latter name, and that Mark and Luke, writing for Christians from the Gentiles, made freer use of the more intelligible “kingdom of God.”

The question may also be put whether in these two phrases the word *βασιλεία* has the abstract sense of “reign” or the concrete one of “realm.” In the Old Testament the corresponding Hebrew term is with reference to God regularly used of the royal authority exercised by Him. This abstract meaning well suits the connection when the kingdom in the Gospels is said to be proclaimed or announced; it also suffices where a coming near, a being near, an appearance are predicated of it, or when men are said to see and hope for it. But it is different when the Gospel speaks of a sitting at meat, or an eating of bread in the kingdom of God, of a calling or inviting into the kingdom, of a being fit for or worthy of the kingdom, of its being shut or people being cast out from it, of the kingdom as a good which is to be sought, which is given, possessed, received, inherited, taken away. In all these cases the

word certainly has concrete associations. Both the abstract and the concrete sense, therefore, find support in the usage of Jesus.

The most important question connected with this central idea of our Lord's preaching concerns the exact nature of the order of affairs designated by it. Did He mean by the kingdom a new state of things suddenly to be realized in external forms, more or less in harmony with the current Jewish expectations, or did He mean by it, primarily at least, a spiritual creation gradually realizing itself in invisible ways? For convenience sake these two conceptions may be distinguished as the eschatological and the spiritual-organic conception, provided it be kept in mind that these two are not logically nor historically exclusive. It is necessary, however, to make the distinction, because in modern writings both have in turn been pushed to an extreme in which they become exclusive each of the other. The tendency at present among those who believe that Jesus was conditioned by His age and environment is to make His conception of the kingdom largely eschatological. On the other hand, where the originality and uniqueness of Jesus' teaching as over against the Old Testament and Judaism and apostolic doctrine, are strongly emphasized, the opposite tendency appears, viz., to eliminate as much as possible the eschatological elements and to ascribe to Him the idea of a kingdom entirely spiritual and internal. A careful review of the evidence shows that the organic and eschatological conceptions are both present in our Lord's teaching. In reference to the eschatological side it is almost superfluous to establish this in detail. Our Lord repeatedly speaks of the kingdom as a state of things lying altogether above the sphere of earthly and natural life, being so different from the natural conditions that it could not be evolved from the latter by any gradual process (cf. Matt. 8:11, 13:43; Mark 14:25; Luke 13:20, 29, 22:16, 29, 30). It is of more importance to collect the references to the kingdom as a present, spiritual reality. In Matthew 12:28 and Luke 11:20, our Lord appeals to His casting out of demons by the Spirit of God as proof of the advent of the kingdom. According to Luke 17:20, He declared that the kingdom does not come with observation, but is among or within men. And Luke 16:16 makes the kingdom begin from the days of John the Baptist and immediately succeed the law and the prophets as the comprehensive name for the Old Testament dispensation. Both the present reality and the organic-spiritual character of the kingdom are most clearly taught in the great kingdom parables (Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8). In several of these parables the point of comparison is taken from vegetable life, for the express purpose of illustrating the organic mode of its coming. According to all three evangelists, Jesus was aware of having revealed in these parables a relatively new thought concerning the kingdom, which He designates "the mystery of the kingdom" (Mark 4:11). This mystery, this new truth, we may find in the revelation that the kingdom is realized gradually, imperceptibly, spiritually, for in comparison with the Jewish exclusively eschatological expectations this was so novel and startling a thought that it might be fitly called a mystery. Some modern advocates of the eschatological view have tried to escape from this conclusion by assuming that in the original form of the parables, as they were delivered by Jesus, not the kingdom of God but the preaching of the word, as preparatory for the establishment of the kingdom, was referred to, and that the introductory formulas, as they now stand, were added by the evangelists, but there is no critical evidence to support this view. These formulas are not all alike and in part so idiomatic that one can hardly fail to detect in them Jesus' own manner of speech (cf. Mark 4:30).

Both these aspects of the kingdom thus represented in our Lord's teaching must be carefully guarded from current misconceptions. The doctrine of an eschatological kingdom must not be confounded with the ordinary Jewish expectations of the coming age. The latter were national, political, sensual.

It was inevitable that these expectations should more or less color the understanding of what Jesus taught concerning the kingdom not merely among the people but even among His disciples. But we have no right to identify our Lord's own ideas with such misunderstandings. What forms the contrast of God's kingdom in Jesus' mind is never any political power, e.g., that of Rome, but always a superhuman power, viz., that of Satan. The principles of the most unrestricted catholicity of the gospel are clearly given in His teaching, though the conclusions are not formally drawn, evidently because the time was not ripe for this. The eschatological statements about the kingdom are free from all sensualism. It is true, our Lord speaks of the future blessedness in terms of eating and drinking, lying at table, celebrating a banquet, inheriting the earth. But it should be remembered that already in the Old Testament such descriptions are often meant figuratively, that in some cases where Jesus employs them the figurative character is written on their very face, and that we have at least one explicit declaration of His, which denies the continuance in the future kingdom of the sensual enjoyments of this present life (Mark 12:25). On the other hand, in understanding such things spiritually we must not go to the opposite extreme of emptying them of all solid content. In that case all difference between the organic and eschatological kingdom would fall away. We have no right to believe that these figures refer exclusively to internal processes. Decisive against this is that our Lord believed in a bodily resurrection. The eschatological kingdom will, according to Him, have its own external environment, and its own external forms of life. Only, these are to be of a higher order than those which belong to the earthly state of existence, in consequence of which great differences prevail between the two. By saying, therefore, that Jesus speaks in "figurative" terms, we take the word "figurative" in that specific sense which it receives from the principle of parallelism between the heavenly and the earthly spheres. What He says about the forms of eternal life is not arbitrarily chosen, but taken from things which in their very nature are a copy of the higher world. Thus they give a real revelation concerning that world and yet do not lie open to the charge of expressing a sensualistic conception of the eschatological kingdom.

It is equally necessary, however, to guard against misconception the other side of our Lord's teaching, that which relates to the organic-spiritual kingdom. That the kingdom first of all has its seat in the internal sphere, by no means implies that purely natural processes are here at work. The circumstance that many of the kingdom parables are taken from the province of vegetable life, has given countenance to this error. The point of comparison, however, is in these parables nowhere the naturalness, but everywhere the gradualness and invisible character of the process. Nor should the spiritual side of the kingdom be confounded with the purely ethical, as is often done in modern representations of the subject. The organic kingdom cannot be limited to the ethical sphere. It extends much further and includes much more than "the reciprocal activity of mankind on the principle of love." It is associated in the teaching of Jesus with numerous things that, if a distinction between ethics and religion be made, will have to be called specifically religious. In the Lord's prayer the petitions "thy kingdom come" and "thy will be done" are followed by the other petitions, "forgive us our debts" and "lead us not into temptation." Undoubtedly the church also with all its fullness of life is one of the forms in which the kingdom embodies itself (Matt. 16:18, 19). Last of all, the final renewal of the world with all its eschatological implications belongs to the coming of the kingdom, so that the latter must necessarily have a wider scope than that of the Christian's ethical activity or the inner life of the soul.

But what is the relation between these two aspects of the kingdom? If sometimes the kingdom

is described as coming in the future so absolutely as if it did not yet exist, and if sometimes it is represented as existing in the present so completely as if no further coming of it were required, do not the Gospels here involve themselves in a hopeless contradiction? The answer to this must be that our Lord's conception was that of one kingdom coming in two successive stages, and that insofar the old dogmatic distinction between a kingdom of grace and a kingdom of glory not quite adequately reflects His meaning. In the great kingdom parables the two stages are clearly set forth as forming one process. The harvest belongs to the growing and ripening of the wheat. Nevertheless the figure also implies that the coming of the kingdom in the end will be due to a direct divine interposition. Though the harvest fitly crowns the process of growth, yet it is not something naturally resulting from the growth itself. The difference between the organic and the eschatological coming of the kingdom and the resulting difference in its two successive states may be formulated as follows: (a) The one proceeds gradually, the other in a crisis with sudden developments accumulating at the end. (b) The organic kingdom comes in the internal, invisible sphere, so that its realization is a hidden process; the eschatological kingdom comes also in the external, visible sphere, so that its realization will be a manifest act observable by all. (c) The eschatological coming of the kingdom does more than merely make externally manifest what internally was already there before. The entire language which Jesus employs in regard to it presupposes that it will bring blessings transcending those of the present stage of the kingdom. All imperfections will be done away with, all enemies vanquished, the wheat and the tares will no longer be permitted to intermingle, the full satisfaction with righteousness and the beatific vision of God will be enjoyed. It is true, our Lord always emphasizes that the heart and essence of the kingdom may be possessed in the present life. But it is plain that He could not have spoken so absolutely of the eschatological crisis as *the coming of the kingdom*, had not the thought been in his mind that, after all, only the end of the world can bring the full and adequate possession of even those spiritual blessings in which the kernel of the kingdom consists.

* * *

In a previous article we endeavored to discuss some of the formal questions that cluster around the conception of the kingdom of God. We must now look for a moment at the content of the idea from a material point of view. In a general way this content is none other than the whole sum and substance of our Lord's teaching. We do not, however, desire to make an external inventory of this teaching material, but to subsume it under the kingdom-idea as its organizing principle. In order to be able to do this, we must put the question, why the order of things announced by Jesus is introduced by Him under this name of the kingdom. The conception of the kingdom of God is one of those conceptions which, owing to our very familiarity with them and their highly generalizing character, have become almost mere conventional signs. We must, therefore, try to divest ourselves of this colorless conventional usage, and ask what concrete, historical associations were connected with the name in the mind of Jesus. It is obvious that to our Lord Himself the conception of the kingdom was more than a convenient form to combine various elements of truth. So far as the notion was current among the people of His day, it was intimately associated with their false political and sensual expectations. Its popularity, therefore, would rather have acted as a deterrent from its use than as an inducement to the same. If, notwithstanding this danger of misinterpretation to which it exposed Him, our Lord insisted upon making it the central theme of His teaching, we may safely conclude that He must have ascribed to it a profound significance.

We look in vain in the Gospels for anything approaching a definition of the kingdom. The reason for this is not far to seek. Our Lord's teaching is not clothed in the forms of an abstract presentation of truth. His method is not the philosophical one of framing conceptions, but the parabolic one of illustrating the realities of the spiritual world in their various manifestations and embodiments. Hence we never find Him defining, but always describing the kingdom. He handles it throughout as a complex reality of which now one side, then another, is turned toward His disciples that the light of revelation may be concentrated upon it. On the other hand, it is easy to perceive that in the midst of the multiformity of concrete statements resulting from this method, a certain order and system are not entirely lacking. Our Lord's descriptions never lose themselves in the single details, nor do they indiscriminately throw together what is fundamental and what is secondary. Notwithstanding the great variety of illustration, there are certain aspects which constantly recur, which by the prominence they receive force us to recognize in them fundamental aspects of the kingdom, and which for this very reason may be expected to give us the answer to our question, why the complex organism to which they belong is called the kingdom of God.

First of all, then, we may say that the order of things introduced by Jesus is called the kingdom of God, because in it as a whole and in every part of it God is supreme. The conception is a theocentric conception which must remain unintelligible to every view of the world that magnifies man at the expense of God. It carries the theocentric principle into the very heart of soteriology. It reminds us that in the very order of things, which has been arranged for the salvation of man, yet everything is in its ultimate analysis intended for the glory of God. From this it appears how mistaken and one-sided those modern interpretations of the kingdom-idea are, which make it stand exclusively for the ethical relations of men to one another. The conception of the kingdom is a profoundly religious one. Its central place in our Lord's teaching is the most eloquent witness to the absolute supremacy of the religious factor in His consciousness. The kingdom means the subjection of all temporal affairs, of all ethical activities, of all spiritual experiences to a transcendent life-purpose in God. This thought has found its most succinct expression in the closing words of the Lord's prayer: "*Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.*"² And because the kingdom is thus centered in God Himself and in His glory, it can be represented by our Lord as the highest object after which men are to strive. This would be impossible if the conception were framed on any lower principle, because in that case some other object would be interposed between God and man as the absolute end of man's religious aspirations. Because the kingdom means the ideal of religion realized, Jesus declared the scribe to be not far from the kingdom of God, after the latter had acknowledged the commandment to love God with all the heart and all the soul and all the strength and all the mind as the supreme commandment (Mark 12:34). The disciple must seek first the kingdom of the heavenly Father and His righteousness, in distinction from the pagan frame of mind which seeks after the things of the world. It is to be noticed, finally, that the same theocentric point of view which thus finds expression in the idea of the kingdom is also presented by Jesus as the highest aspect under which He considers His entire work in the discourses of the fourth Gospel (cf. John 17:4).

A second line of thought in our Lord's teaching shows us that the new order of things is called a kingdom because it is the sphere in which God manifests His supreme, royal power. This is one of the earliest and most prominent elements of the conception belonging to it from the very first moment where it emerges in the Old Testament revelation. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of conquest. Especially in the prophecy of Daniel, to which our Lord so closely attaches Himself in His teaching

on the subject, the kingdom is presented from this point of view. The Jews were given to interpreting this feature in a national, political sense. Jesus, in accordance with the deeper meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures, lifts the idea into a higher sphere. The foes He thought of as about to be conquered were Satan, sin, and death. It is kingdom against kingdom, but both of these opposing powers belong to a higher world than that to which Rome and her empire belong. One of the clearest sayings, in which our Lord speaks of the kingdom as real and present, describes it as consisting in the power which overcomes Satan: "If I by the Spirit of God (the finger of God) cast out demons, then has the kingdom of God come upon you." In the dislodgment of Satan the kingdom of God comes, exerts its inherent power of conquest. All the miracles, not merely the casting out of demons, find their interpretation in this feature. The powers which will revolutionize heaven and earth are already in motion. While with reference to Satan and his kingdom this power is a destructive and subduing force, it is towards the members of the kingdom a life-giving and life-liberating activity. Hence Jesus, quoting the prophecy of Isaiah, describes His work as involving the release of the captives and the setting at liberty of them that are bruised (Luke 4:18). From this connection with the miracles it might at first sight appear as if the power spoken of had primary reference to the external sphere of the kingdom and consequently belonged chiefly to its eschatological stage of realization. It was when the Sadducees professed themselves unable to understand the conditions of the resurrection life in the transformed world of the final kingdom, that Jesus spoke the words: "Ye err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the *power* of God." Nevertheless it is clearly implied that back of all this there lies an invisible, ethical, spiritual sphere which is the theater of the manifestation of the kingdom power in its highest sense, and in reference to which signs and miracles are but symbols. Back of the casting out of demons lies the spiritual conquest of Satan by Jesus Himself in the temptation, for no one can enter into the house of the strong one and spoil his goods, except he first overcome and bind him. And Jesus ascribes all the power involved in the establishment of the kingdom to the Holy Spirit as its source. With this Spirit He has been anointed not merely to heal and set free the bodies of men, but also to preach the gospel to the poor. If, then, in its very essence the power of the kingdom is the power of the Holy Spirit, it must extend as far as the latter's operation extends and include the entire liberating, renewing, sanctifying work of grace in the hearts of men.

In the third place, Jesus speaks of what He came to establish as the kingdom of God, because it is the sphere in which God as the Supreme Ruler and Judge carries out His holy will in righteousness and judgment. According to oriental custom, which in this respect more closely resembles the order of the divine kingdom than our modern institutions, the kingship and the legislative and judicial functions are inseparably united. The theocratic king of Israel was also the judge and lawgiver of the people. Indeed, "to judge" obtains the general sense of "to reign," as, e.g., when Jesus promises the apostles that they shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). In accordance with this we find that the kingdom is represented by our Lord not merely as involving the judging activity of God, but likewise as identical with righteousness. The striving after righteousness is made the absolutely supreme concern of the disciple. He must hunger and thirst after it, endure persecution for its sake, sacrifice for it all other things. It is plain that only one thing can in this absolute sense be the supreme object of human striving, and, if the place here assigned to righteousness is elsewhere given to the kingdom, it follows that the two must be identical. This is confirmed by Matthew 6:33, "Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Here righteousness is introduced not so much as a second object to be sought by the disciples in addition to the kingdom, but rather as a more precise specification of what the kingdom consists in. But this

saying also teaches how righteousness can be identified with the kingdom of God and yet the latter retain its original, literal sense. For the righteousness whose realization coincides with that of the kingdom is here defined as *the righteousness of God*, of the heavenly Father. And this phrase is not to be taken here in the Pauline sense of an objective, imputed righteousness provided by God Himself. What our Lord means is that the standard, the norm of righteousness, in the kingdom of God lies in God Himself, that not any lower rule abstracted from purely human relations, but the holy nature, the supreme perfection of the Father in heaven is the pattern to which all must conform. And of this again the underlying principle is that every disposition of righteousness realized by the members of the kingdom, every righteous act performed by them, reproduces what God the King is, so that in the sphere of ethical life everything will be reduced to terms of God, and He alone reign supreme, not merely by exacting obedience, but also in the profounder sense of filling all with the reflected glory of His own holiness.

A fourth reason why the new order of things proclaimed by Jesus is called the kingdom of God may be found in the fact that all its blessings are gifts sovereignly and graciously bestowed by God. The king is according to oriental conceptions the source of grace and the fountain of blessing for all his subjects. Hence not infrequently salvation is described in our Lord's parables under the figure of a feast or banquet, prepared by the king. That this mode of representation is not more prominent must no doubt be explained from the influence of another conception, to which the aspect of redemption now under review more easily attached itself, viz., that of the divine fatherhood. Whenever the gracious aspect of salvation and the element of blessedness in the life of believers are emphasized, the idea of God's fatherhood forms in our Lord's teaching their natural background. Not as if the two conceptions of fatherhood and kingship could be held to mark two entirely separated trains of thought in Jesus' mind. The assertion has been recently made that the former of these represents the original, the latter the traditional element in His consciousness, so that, whilst the notion of the kingdom no longer possesses for us any religious value, the idea of divine fatherhood remains of permanent significance. Against this we need only observe that Jesus Himself passes with the greatest ease from the one conception to the other, as if the one suggested the other: "Our *Father*, which art in heaven; hallowed be thy name; thy *kingdom* come." This can be explained only by assuming that, without being entirely identical, yet the two ideas have important associations in common. In the Old Testament already they intertwine, for the same act which made Jehovah Israel's Father likewise made Him Israel's King, viz., the redemption from Egypt. Nor must we forget that according to oriental conceptions kingship is but an enlarged form of fatherhood, tribes and people being conceived as great families with their chiefs and kings as fathers. In our Lord's usage the difference between the two is mainly due to this, that the idea of the divine fatherhood more readily lent itself to express the pronouncedly individual character of the relation between God and the disciple in the kingdom. During the Old Testament God's fatherhood had chiefly related to the nation of Israel in a collective sense. Jesus emphasized the personal application of this truth to every disciple and pointed out the warrant for this in the conception of fatherhood itself. Hence He teaches His followers to address God as Father, rather than as King. For the very reason, however, that the conception of fatherhood only individualizes what is already implied in that of kingship in a collective sense, it should in the reproduction of our Lord's teaching be subsumed under the latter. Everything predicated of God as Father may be also predicated of Him as King and considered an integral part of the kingdom. To the kingdom belong all the gifts of grace—the forgiveness of sins, the reception into sonship, the enjoyment of the love of God, the bestowal of life—in short, the

entire content of the idea of salvation in its widest range. Especially the state of communion with God and of blessedness into which redemption issues is for this reason identified with the kingdom. The kingdom and life are interchangeable conceptions. Our Lord speaks of “entering into life” in the same sense as of “entering into the kingdom,” thus using the verb naturally joined to the one idea also with the other. In the synoptists this identification relates to life and the kingdom both eschatologically conceived, but in John we hear of the birth from above introducing into the present kingdom as into a sphere of new supernatural life.

In all the four aspects enumerated the designation “kingdom of God” rests upon the abstract conception of the divine rule exercised and carried through in the work of salvation. The primary meaning of the name is not that of an organization. It is plain, however, that the principles and forces just considered must inevitably result in the production of a spiritual, ethical, social organism. Hence, as was noticed before, the name “kingdom of God” also has its concrete associations. Most of these belong to its eschatological aspect, inasmuch as not until its final state arrives will the kingdom be provided with that external environment in which it can adequately manifest itself as the one all-comprehensive and permanent organization of redeemed humanity. On the other hand the organic spiritual kingdom is more largely spoken of in dynamic terms as a force, a seed, a leaven, etc. To this it should be added, however, that towards the close of His ministry our Lord opened up the prospect of a new form of development upon which in result of His death and glorification the spiritual kingdom would enter. This is the church (cf. Matt. 16:18, 19). The connection in which this announcement occurs is highly significant. It is immediately followed by the announcement of our Lord’s sufferings and death and resurrection. Obviously the church here appears as that which is to take the place of the Old Testament theocracy, which, by finally rejecting Jesus, has sealed its own fate of destruction. The word *ἐκκλησία* is the ordinary Greek rendering for the Hebrew terms denoting the Old Testament congregation. This church will now be succeeded by a new one, which He specifically calls *His church*, because it will be founded on His accomplished historic work. But it is further plain, that this church represents a phase in the development of the kingdom of God, inasmuch as to Peter, upon whom it is built, as apostolic witness to the messiahship of Jesus, are also given the keys of the kingdom of heaven (vs. 19). And this figure of the keys implies that there will belong to it a certain degree of external organization. We may say, therefore, that in its church form the kingdom already assumes the character of an organized community, standing midway between the invisible spiritual kingdom forces as such and the perfectly organized eschatological consummation.

(Footnotes)

¹ Cf. Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu*, 1:79f.

² Even if these words should not be original in the text of Matthew (they are wanting in Luke and in some important authorities for the version of Matthew, whence the Revised Version has relegated them to the margin), still they would retain much of their weight as a very ancient witness to the conception of the kingdom in the early church.