

## DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM (II)

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE MILLENNIUM

The millennium refers to the time after Christ comes again as King to rule the world and before the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 20:4-6). It is divided into two portions: the heavenly and the earthly parts. **The earthly portion is the kingdom of Messiah**, which the Jewish people are expecting, or the kingdom of the Son of Man, mentioned in Matthew 13:41. It consists of two groups of people. One group is the nations (the sheep in Matthew 25) **as the people**; the other group is the Jewish people **as the priests**, leading the people of the nations to serve God, with the earthly Jerusalem as the center (Zech. 8:20-23; 14:16-17; Isa. 2:2-3; Jer. 3:17).

**The heavenly portion is the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, or the manifested kingdom of the heavens; it is also the kingdom of the Father**, mentioned in **Matthew 13:43**. All the believers who are being disciplined in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today will enter into the heavenly portion of the millennium in the future to enjoy the glory and gladness of the kingdom and reign with the Lord as kings over the nations for a thousand years.

Therefore, **the millennium is the period of Christ reigning over the world as King, while the kingdom of the heavens (referring to the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens) is the heavenly portion of the millennium in which Christ and the overcoming saints will reign as kings over the world** (Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4-6; 2 Tim. 2:12; Luke 19:17, 19).

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE KINGDOM OF MESSIAH

In the Old Testament the Lord promised the Jewish people that the anointed One, that is, the Messiah (in Hebrew Messiah means “the anointed One”), will come to inherit the throne of David and restore the Jewish nation, that is, the nation of Israel. We can see this in Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:13, 16; Psalms 2:8-9; 72:1-20; 89:4; 110:2-3; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5, 10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 30:9; 33:14-17; Ezekiel 21:27; 34:23-24; 37:24, 28; Daniel 2:35; 7:14; Hosea 3:5; Amos 9:11-12; and Zechariah 3:8; 6:12-13; 9:9-10.

When the Lord Jesus came the first time, the Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to restore His kingdom (Luke 2:25; 3:15; 7:19; John 1:41; 7:27, 41). However, it will not be until the Lord’s second coming that He will restore the Messianic kingdom (Matt. 23:39). The kingdom which the Lord, the Messiah, will restore—**the kingdom of Messiah or the kingdom of Israel to be restored in the future** (Acts 1:6)—is **the earthly portion of the millennium, “the tabernacle of David” which the Lord will rebuild (15:16), and the kingdom which God has prepared from the foundation of the world for the “sheep” that are to be the people on the earth during the millennium** (Matt. 25:32-34). The Lord will sit on the “throne of David” and “reign over the house of Jacob” (the Jewish people, Luke 1:32-33), ruling over the nations on the earth during the millennium (Psa. 2:8; 72:8; Dan. 7:14; 2:35).

Therefore, the kingdom of the heavens is definitely different from the kingdom of Messiah. **The kingdom of Messiah is the earthly portion of the millennium; the kingdom of the heavens, that is, the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, is the heavenly portion in the millennium.** The kingdom of Messiah is earthly; the kingdom of the heavens is heavenly. Before the kingdom of Messiah comes, the kingdom of the heavens, that is, the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, is already with the overcoming believers. **The kingdom of Messiah is for the Jewish people to be restored in the future and for the Gentiles as “sheep”; the kingdom of the heavens is for the overcomers in the church.** The future kingdom of Messiah is the expectation of the Jews; the future kingdom of the heavens, that is, the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, should be the expectation of the believers (the overcoming ones). In the kingdom of Messiah, there will be the Jewish people as the priests and the Gentiles as the people; in the future kingdom of the heavens, there are only the kings and not the people. **The people to be ruled over by the kings in the future kingdom of the heavens are the ones who will be in the kingdom of Messiah.** Therefore, the kingdom of Messiah is the subordinate of the future kingdom of the heavens; the future kingdom of the heavens is the ruling authority of the kingdom of Messiah. **The overcomers in the church will reign with Christ for one thousand years in the kingdom of the heavens, ruling over the Jews and Gentiles in the kingdom of Messiah** (Rev. 20:4, 6; Matt. 19:28; Rev. 2:26).

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HEAVENS AND THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

The heavens spoken of here refer to the third heaven, where God and the Lord Jesus dwell. The third heaven is a dwelling place where God and the Lord Jesus are today. The kingdom of the heavens is a kingdom, the ruling of the heavens today, wherein the seeking believers are submitting to the heavenly authority and receiving the heavenly discipline, control, and training. In the future, the kingdom of the heavens is the manifestation of the ruling of the heavens during the millennial kingdom. At that time, the Lord Jesus and the overcoming saints will be ruling over the world. **The third heaven is in heaven; the kingdom of the heavens is on the earth.**

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE CHURCH

The church is neither a physical building, nor a place, nor an organization, nor a denomination, nor an evangelistic group. The church in the original language is *ekklesia*, which means “*the assembly of the called-out ones*.” The church is a group of people whom God has called out from the world. **The totality of this people on one hand is *the Body of Christ* (Eph. 1:23); on the other hand, it is *the house of God* (1 Tim. 3:15).** The Body of Christ denotes both the relationship and function of the church to Christ. The house of God denotes both the relationship and the function of the church to God. **Related to Christ**, the church came out of Christ and has His life. Hence, the church is the Body, the fullness of Christ—His continuation, extension, and spreading. It is able to express and testify Christ anytime and anywhere. **Related to God**, the church was born of God and has His life. Hence, the church is God’s household, His dwelling place, enabling Him to have a place on the earth where He can rest, express His desire, fulfill His purpose, and manifest His glory.

We have to be clear about one thing: **the church is different from Christianity.** In the world’s eyes, Christianity is the church. But in the eyes of God and in the eyes of those who know God, there is a great difference between Christianity and the church. Christianity is that which men have organized in the world; the church is that which God has delivered out of the world. **Christianity is the religious organization, that is, the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens; the church is a living organism, that is, the Body of Christ and the spiritual dwelling of God.**

To be a part of Christianity requires only **a ritual of being baptized and joining Christianity.** By this, one can become a nominal Christian. To participate in the church **requires regeneration through repentance to God and faith in Christ, causing one to become a member of Christ and a child of God.** **In the world’s eyes, those who are in Christianity are in the church. However, in God’s eyes, those who are in Christianity may not all be in the church. This is because in Christianity there are many who have not been regenerated through repentance to God and faith in Christ. Hence, they are neither the members of Christ nor the children of God.**

The church is the Body of Christ and the house of God as well, while the kingdom of the heavens is a heavenly kingdom. The church denotes a believer’s position and blessing along with his life and function; the kingdom of the heavens denotes a believer’s living and responsibility today with his authority and glory in the future. The church is the grace which a believer receives; the kingdom of the heavens is the training which a believer receives today and the reward which he receives in the future. A believer in the church is a member of Christ enjoying Christ as life and also a child of God enjoying the blessing in the house of God. A believer in the kingdom of the heavens is a heavenly subject submitting to the heavenly authority and receiving heavenly control and discipline today, and in the future he will be a heavenly king exercising heavenly authority to rule over the world and to enjoy heavenly glory and joy with Christ. **As long as one has the life of God, he is in the church, but he must have a heavenly living in order to be in the kingdom of the heavens. All the saved ones are in the church, but not all the saved ones are in the kingdom of the heavens. This is because not every saved one is living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today, receiving the discipline of the kingdom. Nor will he be in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future to receive the reward. Only those believers who are presently submitting to the heavenly authority, receiving the discipline of the kingdom of the heavens, are in the kingdom of the heavens today and will be thus able to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to reign as kings. Those who participate in the kingdom of the heavens, that is, the reality and the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, naturally participate in the church, but those who participate in the church may not necessarily participate in the kingdom of the heavens. A saved one merely participates in the church; a saved and overcoming one participates both in the church and in the kingdom of the heavens. To participate in the church requires only**

salvation through faith, but **to participate in the kingdom of the heavens requires further seeking to overcome, submitting to heavenly authority, and receiving heavenly control and discipline after experiencing salvation.**

## A COMPARISON OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS, THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND THE CHURCH

The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens has a very wide scope, including all who are called Christians, regardless of whether they are real or false. **Not all those who are in the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens are in the church, because not all of them are saved.** Only the saved ones among them are in the church. **The scope of the church is therefore narrower than the scope of the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. The church includes only those who are true believers, having the life of Christ.**

All those who are in the church are also in the kingdom of God, because during the dispensation of the church, the church is the kingdom of God. The scope of the church and the scope of the kingdom of God during the dispensation of the church are the same. However, not all those who are in the church are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, because not all of them are overcomers. **Only the overcomers in the church are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.** Thus, **the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is narrower than that of the church and the kingdom of God. It includes only the believers who are living a heavenly life and are overcomers.**

Those who are being disciplined today in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are those who will reign in the future in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore, **the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is equal to the scope of the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.**

**The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, Christendom, is related to the nominal Christians. The church and the kingdom of God are related to the saved ones. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens and the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens are related to the overcoming believers. A nominal Christian is only in the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, that is, Christendom.** A person who is merely saved is in the church and in the kingdom of God. **Only those who are saved and seeking to overcome, submitting to the heavenly authority, and receiving the heavenly discipline are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today and can enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future.**

According to God's original intention and salvation, there should not be these differences and comparisons. God's original intention was to make the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, and the church the same in scope during the dispensation of the church. The church is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 16:18-19). Those who are in the church are those who are in the kingdom of God; those who are in the kingdom of God are also those who are in the kingdom of the heavens. The scope of the three are the same, but their definitions differ. **The church denotes the position of the believers**—called out of the world and standing outside of the world. The church in Greek is ekklesia, meaning "the called-out ones assembling together." **The kingdom of God denotes the life of the believers**, which is of God and is capable of living within the realm of God. All those who are in the kingdom of God are born of God (John 3:3, 5). **The kingdom of the heavens denotes the living of the believers who are submitting to the heavenly ruling and receiving the heavenly discipline.** The kingdom of the heavens is the ruling of the heavens. According to God's intention, the definitions of these three may be different, but their scope should be absolutely the same. **All those who are in the church ought to be in the kingdom of God, and all those who are in the kingdom of God ought to be in the kingdom of the heavens.** This is God's intention, and God's salvation has saved us to such an extent.

**Why then did the scope of these three parts become different?** Why is the scope of the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens wider than the scope of the church and the kingdom of God? And why is the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens narrower than the scope of the church and the kingdom of God? **These differences are due to the confusion of Satan and the degradation of the believers. If Satan had not brought in the false believers and if the real believers had not become degraded, then the scope of the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, and the church would be the same.**

The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is wider in scope than the church and the kingdom of God **because Satan has put many tares, false believers, into Christianity. These false believers are apparently different from the worldly people, but actually they are not. They are still worldly people with no change; they have merely**

outwardly put on the name of a Christian. Apparently, they are in the church, but actually, they are outside the church. The church differs from them just like she differs from the worldly people. Because these false ones have joined Christianity, Christianity has grown enormous and has become wider in scope than the church and the kingdom of God.

The scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is **narrower** than that of the church and the kingdom of God because a great number of the believers in the church, that is, in the kingdom of God, have **become degraded and have not met the standard of the kingdom of the heavens**. Although all the saved believers are in the church and in the kingdom of God, **many have fallen from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens**. Although the defeated ones and the believers who are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are both in the church and in the kingdom of God, and are inseparable, **the defeated ones have lost the heavenly position of the church and have neglected the divine life of the kingdom of God**. The salvation of God has delivered them into the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, placing them on such an exalted position; yet due to their insubordination to the ruling of the kingdom of the heavens and their disobedience to the heavenly ruling and discipline, they have fallen away from God's salvation. The heavenly position of the church is as exalted as that of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens is the heavenly position of the church. **Their falling away from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens cannot reverse the fact that they are in the church, but it can cause them to lose the heavenly position of the church**. Although they are still children of God, they are children who have **fallen away from God's standard**—the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Although they are the heavenly people, **they do not live like the heavenly people**. They are the heavenly people who have **fallen away from the heavenly ruling**. Oh, how many fallen Christians there are today! Believers who have fallen away from God's salvation, from the level of God's salvation, from the heavenly position of the church, and from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens can be found everywhere. How many among the saved ones have not lost the position of God's salvation, the heavenly position of the church, and the nature of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens? A great number of Christians have fallen away from these. **Therefore, the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens has become narrower than the scope of the church and the kingdom of God**.

May the Lord **be gracious to us** so that we may **stand on or return to the level of His salvation to be the Christians of His original intention**. **May we not lose** the heavenly position of the church or neglect the divine life of the kingdom of God **but be disciplined** in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today **so that we may reign with Him** in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future.

*(The Kingdom, Chapter 47)*