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KINGDOM—CHURCH: A BIBLICAL STUDY.

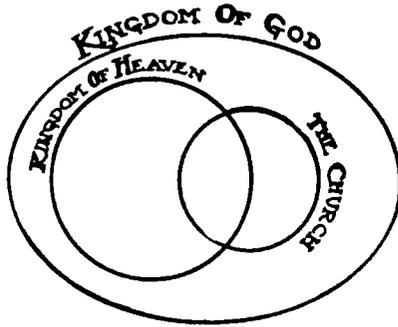
BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM H. BATES, D.D.,
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THERE are three phrases, "kingdom of God," "kingdom of heaven," and "the church," that are often used quite indiscriminately, frequently as synonymous; and while it is true that in large respects they do cover the same spaces of meaning, is it not also true that in other and very important respects each has a concept that distinguishes and differentiates it from the others?

This much it seems but reasonable should be expected and conceded if we allow the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Divine Word and caused it to be written, to have only as much intelligence as is commonly assumed must be possessed in the authorship of even a respectable literary production. And all through the centuries has there not been a troubled and troublesome exegesis because of not regarding the Bible as saying what it means and meaning what it says, and not discriminating between the things that differ?

The attempt is here made to ascertain, if we can, the content of these three terms and their distinguishing differences.

Their relations to each other and the distinctions between them may possibly receive something of explication and illustration by the following diagram:—



The word "kingdom" is from "king" and the old Saxon "dom," doom, dominion, and denotes the king's dominion, authority, sway, rule. And the king's rule, it should be specifically noted, may be either — or both — the actual exercise of his power, or the realm in which he exercises it: his dominion or domain.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

The Kingdom of God, then, is God's dominion and domain: his rule and realm.

This kingdom is universal, all-inclusive, all-comprehending, for "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all" (Ps. ciii. 19). It is an "everlasting kingdom" (Ps. cxiv. 13), covering all time and all space. All objects in time and space, worlds and their contents organic or inorganic, sentient or insentient, material or spiritual, belong to it — "all."

The distinction between rule and realm must constantly be borne in mind. This earth, through the introduction of sin, became a (let us hope there is no other) revolted province. So there is much in God's earthly realm over which he does not "rule," at least immediately: devils, wicked men, all rebels against his authority. There is much, for reasons

best known to himself, that he tolerates but does not sanction; condemns, instead.

Then, the kingdom of God must be viewed as having a twofold administration: over matter and over mind, outward and inward. A person under God's dominion physically may be a rebel against him morally. A wicked man is under God's rule outwardly (in providence, etc.), but not inwardly; in God's kingdom-realm, but not in his kingdom-rule. Jesus' saying, "The kingdom of God is within you" (the kingdom of God "in" those murderous Pharisees to whom he was talking? oh, no!), has application only to the spiritual phase of it, and to those who acknowledge, accept, and submit to his sway.

That a time is coming when God shall rule, in very fact, over all his realm, is to be hoped for and expected.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a term that occurs in the New Testament only in St. Matthew's Gospel, and is used there thirty-two times, but always in the plural — "the heavens" — in the Greek.

On any theory of divine inspiration — yes, granting Matthew but the modicum of cranial gray matter usually credited to a college sub-freshman who at that stage of mental discipline is supposed to be able to use words with precision — the fact that he, specifically, uses a term peculiar to himself, involves the necessary presumption that it has a special and peculiar meaning, a meaning that differentiates it from all other phrases, though they be more or less allied and accordant. This is but a fair literary concession, and this is required to square with ordinary literary demands.

However much the idea may have been latent in or diffused through previous Scripture, it is first enunciated in

and the phrase derived from the Book of Daniel: "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" (ii. 44); "And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Here is the end of the matter" (vii. 27). It is the kingdom which "the God of heaven" will set up at the time and under the conditions specified. It is the kingdom divinely promised to David (not to quote the passages at length: 2 Sam. vii. 7-10. 16; Ps. xxxix. 28-37), described in the prophets (Micah iv. 1-8; Zech. ix. 9, 10, xii.-xiv.; and elsewhere), and through the angel Gabriel confirmed to Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke i. 32, 33). See Acts ii. 29-32; iii. 18-21; xv. 14-17.

This kingdom divinely covenanted to David, if it is "an everlasting kingdom," must be God's final arrangement for the government of this world. The covenant conditions involved obedience upon the part of David and his successors, and also involved chastisement in case of disobedience; but that did not abrogate the covenant. Disobedience came and punishment ensued; the succession was interrupted. There is an interregnum. A successor must be "raised up" (Acts ii. 30, 32) who will never be disobedient, but be always unswervingly and faithfully obedient. When he comes the interregnum shall end, for to him shall be given "the throne of his father David," and of his covenanted government "there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon

his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isa. ix. 7). He is the Messiah. The Davidic kingdom and the Messianic kingdom are identical.

Now, Jesus Christ came to this revolted earth to set up and establish the "rule of the heavens," or the "rule of the God of the heavens," and so bring back the world to be a part of the veritable kingdom-rule of God.

Matthew's Gospel is preëminently the kingdom-gospel.

1. In the first chapter we have the King's genealogy, showing his right to the Davidic succession. 2. In chapter ii. is his birth. 3. In chapters iii.-iv. is his inauguration, his induction into office being by baptism and temptation. 4. In chapters v.-vii. is his inaugural address, the Sermon on the Mount, proclaiming the principles or laws of citizenship in his kingdom. 5. In the eighth chapter he manifests himself to Israel in grace and power. 6. In the ninth chapter is seen the effect of the King's presence upon the leaders of Israel — they spurn him (ix. 34). 7. In the tenth chapter he, sending out his twelve apostles, proffers himself to the people of Israel. 8. In the eleventh chapter he is rejected by Israel. 9. In the twelfth chapter Israel is rejected by him.

Jesus sees an awful crisis approaching. Now occurs an abrupt break in his method and teaching, and he who does not discern this, in the study of Matthew's Gospel, will miss and lose the thread on which the facts narrated are strung. In parabolic teaching which the people do not understand (the crisis being thereby delayed), and which he explains to his disciples privately, he seeks to prepare them for the situation when he shall be taken away. Going, he will be as a

“nobleman” gone into “a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return” (Luke xix. 12).

10. In the thirteenth chapter are seven parables — seven the symbol of completeness — which present the kingdom “in mystery,” or as existing in a concealment: the state of things in the present age or dispensation during the King’s absence. At his return, the kingdom prayed for (Matt. vi. 10) shall “come,” and be established in power and glory (Matt. xxv. 31). 11. In chapter xiv. the kingdom of heaven is further revealed in type. 12. In chapter xv. is portrayed the condition of Israel after the rejection of the King. Now what? We shall see farther on.

THE TWO KINGDOMS DIFFERENTIATED.

The diagram will show how it is that many things spoken concerning the kingdom of heaven may also be predicated of the kingdom of God, and *vice versa*, even though as objects of thought, or as facts, the two differ.

For instance, since the kingdom of heaven is in the earthly sphere of the universal kingdom of God, the two have almost all things in common; and for this reason many parables and other teachings are spoken by Matthew of the kingdom of heaven, and by Mark and Luke of the kingdom of God. (John has no parables.) But not all in common, as omissions significantly show; and here is a differentiation. The parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. xiii. 24–30) is spoken of the kingdom of heaven, but not of the kingdom of God. The wheat is “the children of the kingdom,” and the tares are “the children of the wicked one” (Matt. xiii. 38). While it is true that both the wheat and tares are in the kingdom-realm of God, the tares, the children of the wicked one, are not in the kingdom-rule of God though they are in the king-

dom of heaven. So far, then, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are not coincident, but different. Again, the parable of the dragnet (Matt. xiii. 47, 48) is spoken of the kingdom of heaven, but not of the kingdom of God. The net gathers fish "of every kind," good and bad; and while it is true that both are in the kingdom-realm of God, the bad are not in his kingdom-rule, but are "cast away," while they have their constituent place in the kingdom of heaven. These two kingdom-of-heaven parables, therefore, cannot be used of the kingdom of God.

Again: The kingdom of God is personally entered only by the new birth, for "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3); but the kingdom of heaven, during this age, is the sphere of a profession which may be real (wheat, good fish), or false (tares, bad fish). To be in the kingdom of God, one must have a spiritual experience: one may be in the kingdom of heaven without it.

Still again: The kingdom of God is universal, including all moral intelligences that willingly submit themselves to the Divine will, while the kingdom of heaven is Davidic, mediatorial, Messianic, and has for its object the establishment of the kingdom of God, or divine rule, in the earth.

Once more: The diagram shows the kingdom of heaven ensphered in the kingdom of God, but as a matter of fact the kingdom of heaven will merge into and coincide with 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, 25), and in this form will continue its everlastingness.

There are other kingdom phrases — such as "Father's kingdom" (Matt. xxvi. 29), "kingdom of Christ" (Eph.

v. 5) — which have their inclusion in the two terms we are contemplating viewed as realm or rule, earthly or heavenly, or, in some other aspect, and so do not need separate consideration.

An instance of the lack of the discrimination intimated in our first paragraph, and what it leads to, may not be out of place just here. If these differentiations are valid, the editor of *Watchword and Truth* — so able, so careful, almost always so correct, as an exegete — must be at fault when he says: "In the Gospels, 'the kingdom of heaven' or of 'the heavens' and 'the kingdom of God' are only two names for one kingdom. The names are used interchangeably all through the Synoptic Gospels. It is a mistake, therefore, to try and put a meaning on the one differing from the other" (August, 1914, p. 212). And when he further says, in emphatic type: "There is no kingdom of heaven on earth now," we seem, *if* the two are synonymous, identical, to be left in bad plight, then — though with hope — "without God," or at least without a kingdom of God, "in the world"!

THE CHURCH.

At the close of the fifteenth chapter of Matthew, where we saw the rejection of the King complete, the question was asked, Now what?

When the "kingdom" occupied the whole field of vision — was "the whole thing," so to speak — of course there was nothing said about the church: there was no place or call for it; but with the King and his kingdom rejected, some expedient, some substitute, must be devised. That expedient is THE CHURCH.

The word "expedient," in this connection, will very likely produce something of a revulsion of feeling; but the shock

it gives the reader is small compared with the shocks that came to the writer in the long study that compelled its use. Reading from boyhood the man-made headings to chapters and at the top of pages in the Old Testament, especially in the prophetic books, I imbibed the common belief that the church bulks pretty large in those writings. But those guideposts are simply interpretation, not revelation. It might as well be frankly said right here—on Scripture authority too, for not anything else counts in this study—*there is no such thing as "church" in the Old Testament!* It is kingdom, kingdom, kingdom, all the way through.

That the church is a new device, an afterthought so to say, speaking humanly, is plainly the teaching of St. Paul in the third chapter of Ephesians: "By revelation was made known unto me the mystery . . . which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; *to wit*, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, whereof I was made a minister" (ver. 3-7, Rev.). The same truth is set forth also in Colossians i. 23-27. The revelation of this "mystery" was by special "dispensation" (Col. i. 25) committed to St. Paul. And this "mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God" (Eph. iii. 9) was not that the Gentiles should be saved, but that it was his purpose to make a new thing—"the church which is his [Christ's] body" (Eph. ii. 22, 23)—composed of Gentiles and Jews (1 Cor. xii. 13), and in which their racial distinctions should be lost (Eph. ii. 14, 15, 19, 20). This is the expedient, this is the solution of the problem on which the Old Testament prophets

give no light, that fills the interval between the rejected King's departure and his return,—the church age.

The Greek word for church, *ἐκκλησία, ekklesia*, is used in the New Testament 115 times, and is always translated "church" save three times—Acts xix. 32, 39, 41—when it is translated "assembly," unless we except Acts xix. 37, where the word "hierosulos" (*hieros*, temple, and *sulaō*, to rob) is translated "robbers of churches."

This word is derived from the preposition *ek*, out of, and the verb *kaleō*, to call. If the word "ekkaleō" thus means to call out of, then the noun "ekklesia" would mean that, or those, called out.

The King comes from heaven to this revolted world, God's messenger to an apostate, rebellious race: he calls men to himself, invites them to transfer their allegiance back to God. They who hear and heed his call are, in Scripture language (Rom. viii. 28), *κλητοί, kletoi*, "the called," or again (Matt. xxiv. 22, 24, 31), *ἐκλεκτοί, eklektoi*, "the elect," the called (or chosen) out; and these constitute what the Scriptures call *ἐκκλησία, ekklesia*, "the church."

As we have seen the kingdom of God to exist under a twofold form—dominion or domain, i.e. kingdom-rule and kingdom-realm—so the church exists under a twofold designation, the invisible church and the visible church.

The invisible church. The actual "church," then, consists of those who, hearing Christ's call, transfer their allegiance and love and life to God, of course evidencing the fact by leading the life of the children of God. They who do not, in fact, do this—no matter what they profess—are not of the church, but of "the world that lieth in the evil one" (1 John v. 19); and they who do it, are not of the world, but of the church. This is the church as it is apprehended in

the mind and purpose of God, and is to be presented to his Son, "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. v. 27). This is the genuine, true church of Jesus Christ. This is the "body" of which Christ is "the head" (Eph. i. 22, 23).

This church coincides with the kingdom-rule of God, as the diagram suggests, and entrance to it is, of course, the same as entrance into the kingdom of God, i.e. by the new birth, regeneration, or, as the Greek of John iii. 3 gives it, by being "begotten from above."

The visible church. By confessional word and deed they who hear and heed Christ's call become known. They take on organic form and are denominated by names: hence "denominations." The spiritual becomes phenomenal, the invisible visible. Others, too, become associated with them, just as a "mixed multitude" (Ex. xii. 38) became attached to the Israelites on their journey from Egypt to Canaan—with Israel but not truly of Israel, demoralizing, hindering, a reproach (Num. xi. 4-6). These all belong to the same assembly, yes, to the church: the true belonging to the kingdom of God, the false, who are tares and not wheat, who are bad and not good fish, belonging to the reprobate part of the kingdom of heaven, as the diagram may signify. Such is the visible church.

Denominations. The visible church is thus marked off into "denominations." Of those bearing a Catholic name, there are the Greek Catholic Church, which rightfully claims to be the oldest of all; Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholic Church, Catholic Apostolic Church, Reformed Catholic Church, and Independent Catholic Church. The late Daniel W. Fisher, long the honored president of Hanover College, in his book, "The Unification of the Churches," says there

are 164 Protestant denominations in the United States, of which 24 are Lutheran, 16 Baptist, 13 or 14 Methodist, 12 Presbyterian, 4 Reformed, 2 Episcopalian, 2 Disciple, 2 United Brethren, 1 Congregationalist; while the remaining 87 bodies comprise but about one tenth of the entire Protestant membership. As to the status of these denominationalists, all in these sects, sections, segments, fragments, fractions, parts of the visible church who have "received" Jesus Christ (John i. 12), who "believe" on him (John v. 24; Acts xvi. 31) and are consequently "saved," who are "the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. iii. 26), are of the veritable kingdom of God, and belong to the one, true, invisible church, the "church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Heb. xii. 23). Those who have not this character may have membership in the visible church, but are not of the invisible church. And for any denomination, i.e. any fraction or sect, to claim that it is the whole and only church, as Romanists claim, involves the ridiculous mathematical absurdity that a part, a fraction, is equal to the whole!

According to Acts xv. 13-17, it is the plan and purpose of God, during the present dispensation or church-age while the King is absent and the kingdom of heaven is in abeyance, 'to take out from among the Gentiles a people for his name' — the church — and, when this is accomplished, then the "return" and the open establishment of the kingdom.

If there is no such thing as "church" in the Old Testament, as has been here claimed, it may be asked, Are Christians in this church-age to be debarred from the rich supplies of religious truth with which that portion of Scripture is stored? In all Scripture, "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. ii. 15) requires, surely, an application only to the Jew of what belongs specifically to the Jew, only

to the Gentile of what belongs specifically to the Gentile, and to the church of God (1 Cor. x. 32) what belongs to the church; still, as the diagram may illustrate, while kingdom truth does not belong to members of the church, *as such*, it may belong to the same individuals as members of the kingdom of God, and they are therefore entitled to it. But to filch from the Jew, by a spiritualizing process—how much of this there is!—the blessings that belong specifically to the Jew and bestow them upon the church, yet careful to leave all the curses to be literally visited upon poor Israel's head, is atrocious,—an exegetical graft procedure that should at once and forever cease. Let due discrimination be used.

Another instance of the lack of the discrimination intimated in our first paragraph, and what it leads to, seems pertinent just here. Cardinal Gibbons, in his "Faith of Our Fathers," page 23, says: "The church is called a kingdom. Now in every regulated kingdom there is but *one king, one form of government, one uniform body of laws*, which all are obliged to observe. In like manner, in Christ's spiritual kingdom there must be one chief to whom all owe spiritual allegiance, one form of ecclesiastical government, one uniform body of laws which all Christians are bound to observe." Then follows what, at first blush, appears to be an invincible argument in proof of the claims of the one only church, i.e. the Roman Catholic Church. But a little scrutiny will see the fallacy and fatuity of the Cardinal's argument.

The church is called a kingdom! Does "calling" a thing thus and so make it so? Back in civil-war times a mule was called a brevet horse. Calling the much-enduring but sometimes refractory hinny a horse did not make him a horse: he was a mule just the same. Calling the church a kingdom does not make it a kingdom. The simple fact is, in Scrip-

ture the church is never called a kingdom, nor is Christ ever called the King of the church. He is the “head” of which the church is the “body”: “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory . . . gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body” (Eph. i. 17, 22, 23). In Ephesians v. 23–32 and in Revelation xix. 7–9, the marriage relation is used to depict Christ and the church—he is the “husband,” the church the “wife.” But King never, never! So the prelate’s rock-foundation on which he essayed to build an imposing framework of riveted structural steel with the filling of poured cement turning to adamant, turns out to be a quagmire basis with a specious cardboard structure reared on it: whirling winds, descending rains, raging floods, are not necessary for its demolition—a breath blows it away. And the gift to Peter of “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. xvi. 19), which a footnote in the Douay Bible says signifies “all fulness of ecclesiastical power”! cannot be for use in the wards of the lock of the church, for the plain reason that the kingdom of heaven is not the church.

If the church is a kingdom, the two words should have interchangeable use. But they are never so used in Scripture, and cannot be. Let us try it: Luke xix. 12, ‘Gone into a far country to receive a *church* and to return’? 2 Timothy iv. 1, ‘Who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his *church*’? It won’t work.

It should be said, in brief, that there are four great lines of revelation running through the Bible and first coming into prominence in this order: 1. Creation; 2. The nations; 3. Israel and the kingdom; 4. The church. The New Testament so reverses this order that when Christ, who is the one hope of all these, comes the second time to consummate the Divine

purpose, he has to do, first, with the church which he raises and removes, exalts and glorifies; second, with Israel and the kingdom which he restores; third, with the nations whom he subdues; and fourth, with creation which he will renew, for the creation, which is groaning and travailing in pain now, he will deliver from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. viii. 21, 22).

According to the futurist view of the Book of Revelation — which seems to the writer the only tenable view, however much the preterist and presentist views may seem to have had fulfillment — the historic events beginning with chapter iv., *meta tauta*, “after these things,” belong to the period after the church is removed from the earth, “caught up” (1 Thess. iv. 13–17), for the church is seen no more in the Book after chapter iii. 22. What further office the church has to subserve would be an interesting inquiry which cannot be entered into here.

In our Biblical Study, starting with what seemed to be the necessary assumption that the three phrases, “kingdom of God,” “kingdom of heaven,” and “the church,” while having much meaning in common, nevertheless had each a conception that distinguished and differentiated it from the others, we sought to ascertain, if we could, the content of these terms and what are their distinguishing differences. It is submitted that the following conclusions have been fairly and legitimately — might I not say necessarily? — reached: 1. That the kingdom of God is universal — universe-comprehending — and either as kingdom-realm or kingdom-rule (not always both) encompasses, as the diagram illustrates, the kingdom of heaven and the church. 2. That the kingdom of heaven is that special earthly dominion which God promised to his Son who came down from heaven, and which, rejected, is

now in abeyance while the King is absent, but is to be set up and established in power when he shall return. 3. That the church is an elected, selected, body which is, in its offices, working out God's plan and fulfilling his purpose in the interval while the kingdom of heaven is in abeyance during the King's absence, and shall itself be taken from the earth when the King returns and sets up his promised kingdom.