



Biblical Heritage Center's
Real Yeshua Handbook
Viewing His Words Through the Eyes of His Ancient Culture

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“Kingdom of Godö or ðKingdom of Heavenö?”

By Jim Myers

Many pages of opinions have been written about the terms ðKingdom of Godö and ðKingdom of Heavenö. Some say *they mean the same thing*, others say *they mean different things* and few say *they have very mysterious meanings*. Two questions will help us discover what *Kingdom of God* and *Kingdom of Heaven* mean:

1. *Is there a cultural connection between the words “God” and “Heaven”?*
2. *In which books of the New Testament do the terms appear?*

The answer to the second question is the ðkingdom of Godö occurs 68 times in 10 different *New Testament* books. The ðkingdom of Heavenö occurs only 32 times in the *New Testament* and that is only in the *Gospel of Matthew*. Below are examples of saying of Yeshua that are duplicated in *Matthew* and another *Gospel*.

| Matthew 4:17 | Mark 1:14-15 |
|--|--|
| <i>From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of <u>Heaven</u> is at hand.”</i> | <i>Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of <u>God</u>. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of <u>God</u> is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”</i> |

| Matthew 5:3 | Luke 6:20 |
|--|--|
| <i>Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of <u>Heaven</u>.</i> | <i>Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of <u>God</u>.</i> |

Most scholars agree that the author of Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience with a Jewish culture that recognized that ðHeavenö was a *euphemism* for the Hebrew word *elohiym* (god) and the four-letter Hebrew word that is the name of the Jewish god, *YHVH*.

A euphemism is a figure of speech by which a softened, indirect expression is substituted for a word or phrase offensive to delicate ears though more accurately expressive of what is meant. There are a number of euphemisms in the Hebrew Scriptures that are used for things like *dying, genitals, sex, cursing, etc.*

In the Jewish culture observant Jews used the euphemism ðHeavenö to avoid breaking this commandment:

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. (Exodus 20:7)

Two additional examples of this also appear in *Luke* and both are in the sayings of Yeshua. The first is found in the parable of the *Prodigal Son*:

“Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you . . .” (Luke 15:18)

The prodigal son was speaking to father. The second example is found in a question Yeshua asked the Pharisees:

“The baptism of John — was it from Heaven or from men?” (Luke 20:4)

Conclusion:

Kingdom of God and *Kingdom of Heaven* are names of the same thing. In the *Gospel of Matthew*, the target audience was Jewish, and the author used *Kingdom of Heaven*. In the other books of the New Testament the target audiences included many non-Jews, who would not have known that *ōHeavenō* was a euphemism, so the authors used *Kingdom of God*. However, even though the two terms are names of the same thing, it is very important to know that first century Jewish sects had very different beliefs about *what the kingdom is, who will be in it, and when it will appear*. We will discuss those differences in future blogs.

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