

## “Kingdom of Heaven” or “Kingdom of God”?

By Jim Myers

The two terms, “*Kingdom of Heaven*” and “*Kingdom of God*,” create a great deal of confusion for readers of English translations of the *New Testament*. They also caused a great deal of confusion for scholars and theologians who are able to work with the languages of Greek and Hebrew. This is very clear from the number of books and articles they have written.

When I looked up the appearances of “*Kingdom of Heaven*” and “*Kingdom of God*” in *The New Testament* I discovered the “***Kingdom of God***” appears **68 times** in **10 different books**. The “***Kingdom of Heaven***” appears **32 times** and it **only appears in the *Gospel of Matthew***. What makes this very interesting is that a number of the appearances above in which the two phrases appear are in books that record the same account of Yeshua teachings like the ones below from the *New King James Translation*:

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Matthew 4:17

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say,  
“Repent, for the ***Kingdom of Heaven*** is at hand.”

Mark 1:14-15

Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the ***Kingdom of God***,  
“The time is fulfilled, and the ***Kingdom of God*** is at hand.  
Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

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Matthew 5:3

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the ***Kingdom of Heaven***.*

Luke 6:20

*Blessed are you poor, for yours is the ***Kingdom of God***.*

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Jewish Hebrew speakers today recognize that the *Gospel of Matthew* contains a number of well-known *Hebrew idioms and euphemisms*.

- An *idiom* is a word or group of words that cannot be literally translated from the Source's language into the Receptor's because an idiom's meaning cannot be understood from its component parts. An example of an America idiom is the underlined phrase in the following sentence – He really put his foot in his mouth this time. We know what it means because we have heard it used so many times. But, think about the picture it would pain in a non-American speaker's mind, if he took the underlined words literally.
- A *euphemism* is defined as a substitute of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant; i.e., “Did you hear that Jack kicked the bucket?”

In the phrase “*Kingdom of Heaven*,” the word “Heaven” is a very well-known *euphemism* that is still used today for the Hebrew word *elohiyim* (which is translated “*god*”) and the four-letter Hebrew word that is transliterated “*YHVH*” (the “*unspoken name of the Jewish god*”). “*Yahweh*” is also a euphemism for the “*unspoken name*.” Therefore, “*Kingdom of Heaven*” and “*Kingdom of God*” mean exactly the same thing.

So, why did Matthew use “*Kingdom of Heaven*”? The answer is that he was writing for Hebrew speaking Jewish readers. The authors of the other ten books were writing for either non-Hebrew speaking Jewish or Gentile readers. Based on other linguistic evidence in the *Gospel of Matthew* -- it is the most “*Hebraic*” text of all of the books of the New Testament.

Yeshua used “*Kingdom of Heaven*” when he taught. For him, the *Kingdom of Heaven* “*emerges out of the power of God and is made a reality upon the earth by men. This is the work of the members of his movement.*” For Yeshua, the *Kingdom of Heaven* was at hand” (Matt. 4:17), and that meant it was already here and had was spreading across the earth.

According the Jewish scholar Dr. David Flusser, this is how Yeshua viewed the Kingdom:

- *The Kingdom of Heaven is not simply a matter of God’s kingship.*
- *The Kingdom of Heaven is also the domain of God’s rule.*
- *The Kingdom of Heaven is an ever-expanding realm embracing more and more people.*
- *The Kingdom of Heaven is a realm into which one may enter and find one’s inheritance.*
- *The Kingdom of Heaven is a realm where there are both the great and the small.*<sup>1</sup>

In the earlier article, “[What must one do to be saved?](#)”, the King made an important reference to the “*kingdom*” when he addressed the ones on his right (the ones that did *acts of tzedaqah*):

“*Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*” (Matthew 25:34)

One point will be repeated throughout the teachings – “*the requirement of doing tzedaqah in order to be a member of the Kingdom of Heaven.*” This point was specifically made by Yeshua to the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20):

*For I say to you, that unless your tzedaqah (“righteousness”) exceeds the tzedaqah of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*

*Yeshua saw himself as the Anointed One leading this ever-expanding movement under God’s kingship that was bringing God’s rule to the earth. The proof of the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven was that God’s image was being revealed through people doing acts of tzedaqah.*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sage From Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus’ Genius* By David Flusser; © 2007 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI; p. 111.